

March-April 2012

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Bhagwan Swaminarayan
His Life and Works



UTTARAYAN CELEBRATIONS 14 January 2012, Mumbai

1. During the Uttarayan celebrations Swamishri blesses the assembly and then hails the traditional call, "Narayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho". Thereafter he holds a bowl of grains to display it to the devotees.



- 2-3. In the Abhishek Mandap, Mumbai, Swamishri performs arti of the murtis for 13 new BAPS hari and kutir mandirs in cities, villages and tribal areas of Gujarat.

Title Cover: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Godhra.

Photographs by BAPS Volunteers



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Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

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In April 1978 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

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FIRST WORD

In his blessings to a satsang assembly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj explains briefly the life and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme God, incarnated on earth. His purpose was to bless countless *jivas* with *moksha*. One sees so many activities and works being done in our world, but to make *jivas* attain the state of *brahmarup* (God-realization) is the highest and greatest of all works. Till the *jiva* does not become *brahmarup* or it does not shed the coils of *maya* it remains miserable and unhappy. Shriji Maharaj willed to make *jivas* *brahmarup*. He has declared this in Vachanamrut Gadhadha I 71, that he had come on earth along with his Dham (abode), *akshar muktas* (realized souls) and his divine powers. He addresses his devotees to understand his form, know the form of Aksharbrahman and offer bhakti to God. One must understand this message and talk to others.

He firstly explained dharma as “*Dharmo jneyaha sadāchārāha* (Know dharma to be moral action).” When a person becomes moral, regardless of which religion and caste he belongs to, no conflicts remain. *Sadachar* means observing truth, having compassion, abiding by ahimsa, *brahmacharya*, honesty and other virtues. One who is wedded to these qualities is said to be moral. And all people express their love for such a person.

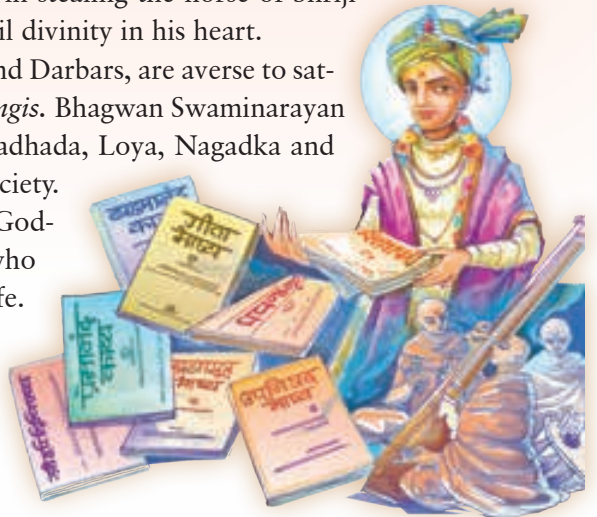
When there is morality in society, we have a happy society. It was for this purpose that Bhagwan Swaminarayan gifted the Shikshapatri [a moral code of conduct for all]. He wrote in it that the Shikshapatri is for the good of all *jivas*. Like the Bhagavad Gita, which is accepted by all, the Shikshapatri is also appreciated and believed by many. Whoever carefully reads and understands the Shikshapatri will be inspired to make one’s life pure and trouble-free.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired countless people to live according to the Shikshapatri. He transformed dacoits and hardcore sinners into devotees. Joban Pagi could not be reined in by anyone. He even ransacked the vault of the king of the Gaekwad kingdom. He was transformed into a devotee after his failed attempts in stealing the horse of Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj purged his evil nature to instil divinity in his heart.

One finds that the warrior class, the Kathis and Darbars, are averse to satsang, but he also inspired them to become *satsangis*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan lived in the homes of Kathis and Darbars at Gadhadra, Loya, Nagadka and Sarangpur. Maharaj developed a large spiritual society. The second thing he thought of was the need of God-realized sadhus in society. He initiated sadhus who had no addictions and lived a pure, moral life. And his sadhus travelled in society, imparting the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma.

The 500 *paramhansas* Shriji Maharaj initiated were of no ordinary calibre.

(Contd. on pg. 12)



SHRI HARI IN LOYA

Shri Hari was in the village of Botad. During a sweet confrontation between Jivuba and Sura Khachar, the former invited Maharaj to celebrate the Shakotsav at Lakshmivadi in Gadhada and the latter proposed that he come to Loya...

Jivuba sprightly conveyed to Maharaj, “The quality of brinjals this year at Lakshmivadi is nowhere to be found in the entire region. And Maharaj, you like eating brinjals, which is why we insist that you to come to Gadhada. Sura Khachar, Hamir Khachar and Daha Bapu will also come there with you.”

Shri Hari replied briskly to Jivuba, “For Sura Khachar, there’s no question of getting quality brinjals. He will pay any price to get them from anywhere. I will celebrate the Shakotsav (festival of vegetables and *rotla*) in Loya, and you will all have to come there. And I also desire to celebrate the festival of Vasant in Loya.”

Jivuba reminded herself that since Maharaj has created gold, silver and diamonds on earth it is of no great matter for him to produce the best quality of brinjals anywhere! She thus complied, “Maharaj, forgive me. You are all-powerful. You can create anything from anywhere. You wish to bless Sura Khachar and his wife, Shantiba, with your divine bliss. Please go ahead to Loya. We will bring the brinjals of Lakshmivadi for the Shakotsav.”

Shriji Maharaj was pleased by Jivuba’s understanding. He was inclined towards devotees who were simple, flexible and respectful towards each other. He organized festivals and celebrations to foster camaraderie and mutual respect among the devotees. Maharaj also publi-

cally praised the devotion of his devotees during these festive gatherings.



SHRI HARI DINES AT ADA SHETH’S HOUSE IN BOTAD

Shri Hari resided at Bhaga Sheth’s house in Botad. The living arrangements for the devotees were made at the farm of Matra Dhadhal. During Maharaj’s stay the devotees of Botad invited him to their homes. Ada Sheth requested Shri Hari, who was to leave early next morning, “I will have your meal prepared

early tomorrow morning. After you take your meal you may leave for Loya.”

Shri Hari accepted his invitation and informed the sadhus and devotees with him to get ready early next morning for their journey to Loya. The next day, Maharaj completed his daily rituals and sat down to have his meal. Ada Sheth and his family had stayed up all night to prepare the variety of sweets and other items. Maharaj was surprised to see so many freshly made dishes. He asked Ada Sheth, “When did you make all these items?”

“Maharaj, we had the whole night to prepare. We are blessed today because you came with your sadhus and *parshads*. We have been graced with such *seva*.”

“What have you prepared for the sadhus and devotees?” Maharaj enquired.

“Maharaj, we have prepared the same items

for all. You'll have to come and serve them once you've finished your meal," replied the Sheth happily. Shortly after, Maharaj served food to the sadhus, sixty *parshads* and devotees.

A PLEDGE NOT TO TRAVEL BY CART

Shri Hari stayed a few days more in Botad before departing with Sura Khachar to Loya. Maharaj told the devotees with him to proceed towards Loya. He instructed the senior sadhus to travel by bullock cart and the young sadhus to follow on foot. Then Maharaj asked, "Those who have vowed not to travel by bullock cart stand up." Immediately Nirmananand Swami stood up and said, "I will not sit in a cart as long as I live. If I get ill and become unconscious and someone puts me into a cart, I'll get off the moment I regain consciousness."

Shri Hari was pleased with his pledge and praised, "Only when one has such inner strength can one abide by *niyams*."

MAHARAJA IN LOYA

The devotees of Loya and Nagadka were waiting by the banks of river Bhadravati to welcome Maharaj and his party. With Maharaj's arrival on 29 November 1820 (A.S. 1877, Kartak *vad* 9), everyone was renewed with joy and pride. The devotees of Loya and Nagadka prostrated to Maharaj. The welcome sound of musical instruments rent the air. Shri Hari was festively received and led straight to the home of Sura Khachar. Since the living area for the sadhus was limited Maharaj told them to adjust and accommodate themselves. A wall divided the residential quarters of Maharaj and the sadhus. To facilitate darshan of Maharaj Nishkulanand Swami constructed a high platform for Shri Hari to sit on.

Sura Khachar and his wife, Shantiba, had taken great care in avoiding any discomfort to the sadhus and devotees during their stay. To mitigate the harsh winter cold for the sadhus Sura Khachar had set up a shamiana outside their living quarters. Daily, Shri Hari put on a warm coat

offered by Girdharbhai, the son of Bechar Man-ki of Ahmedabad, and further wrapped himself in a thick warm blanket.

ONLY A GREAT SADHU OR BRAHMACHARI WILL SUCCEED ME ON MY SEAT

Every day, mornings and evenings, Muktanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others would sing bhajans. Thereafter, Shri Hari discoursed to the assembly. Vasudevanand Varni was attending upon Maharaj at the time. Once, on seeing him, Maharaj stated, "Though Varni is young he is very understanding. He abides by my wishes and beholds all sadhus and devotees with respect and glory. He feels proud in having got the opportunity of serving me. Usually one finds arrogance in a Brahmin, but Varni is a humble servant. And this is why my mind rests upon him with joy." Then Maharaj called Vasudevanand Varni towards him and lauded, "You are young and humble, so I find you to be great. Today, I want you to sit on my seat." Shri Hari asked for his seat and he made him sit on it. Then Maharaj declared, "Whether I am here or not, the world will know that only one who is a sadhu or *varni* can succeed my seat."

Shri Hari's words were pregnant with meaning. He wished to perpetuate his own established Sampradaya through a guru *parampara*. And the tradition of gurus would continue through their bona fide renunciation and foster the Sat-sang fellowship.

But the occasion made Vasudevanand Varni worried. He told Maharaj, "I am a junior, how can I succeed your seat?"

Shri Hari smiled and replied, "One who is egoistic cannot succeed me. Only one who is humble can enhance the glory of my seat." Varni was extremely hesitant while sitting on Maharaj's seat. But he could do nothing because Maharaj had made him do so. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave



At the dawn of the 19th century, the regions of Gujarat and Saurashtra were plagued by the evils of social disorder. With the fall of Peshwa rule, the British had seized power. Here, as elsewhere in India, bands of wandering *bawas* tormented the villages, demanding meat, alcohol and adulterous relations wherever they went. They suppressed the gullible villagers to fulfil their sinful desires. Their threats, looting and adultery spread terror in everyone's hearts.

ditions many years older than him.

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his journey in the village of Loj in Saurashtra, where he stayed in the ashram of Ramanand Swami. There, he met the senior sadhu of the ashram, Muktanand Swami, and was pleased to receive satisfactory answers to his questions regarding the nature of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman.

During his early days in the ashram, Nilkanth changed the prevailing practice of mixed spiritual assemblies and arranged separate assemblies for men and women. He sealed the hole in the wall between the ashram and neighbouring householder's home, and realizing that it was, in fact, a hole in the sadhus' observance of dharma, he stopped the practice of exchanging burning embers with the neighbouring women.

These changes represented the initial steps of his spiritual transformation of society. Shortly, thereafter, guru Ramanand Swami initiated Nilkanth into the sadhu-fold and named him 'Narayanmuni' and 'Sahajanand Swami'. A year later, on 16 November 1801, Ramanand Swami ritually and festively appointed Sahajanand Swami as the head of the Sampradaya in his place. Ramanand Swami told his sadhus and devotees, "To establish *ekantik* dharma and guide countless *jivas* to become *brahmarup* and attain Akshardham, the Lord of Akshardham, Purushottam Narayan, is manifest before us. If you understand his true form and glory and develop resolute faith in him, you will all attain liberation." Within a month, Ramanand Swami departed from this mortal world.

Subsequently, Bhagwan Swaminarayan began his efforts to rejuvenate spirituality in society. Drawn by his divine personality and ways, many impious, vain and envious people from all walks of life shunned their impiety and became his disciples.

One of the divine methods Sahajanand Swami used was that of granting *samadhi*, a transcendental state normally experienced only after many years of rigourously practicing *ashtang* yoga.

SAMADHI PERIOD

Bhagwan Swaminarayan granted the divine experience of *samadhi* to encourage people to embrace spirituality. By merely having his darshan, people entered the state of *samadhi*. However, many were sceptical and suspicious of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine powers and so avoided his presence. Then people began to enter *samadhi* by merely hearing the sound of his *chakhdis*. In Mangrol, when Bhagwan Swaminarayan walked through the bazaar, the shopkeepers were transported into *samadhi*, becoming stationery in whatever activity they were engaged in at the time. In *samadhi*, people had darshan of the deity in whom they had faith. On emerging from *samadhi*, the shopkeepers felt elated and became disciples of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Many had darshan of the various avatars emerging from and then merging into Shriji Maharaj, which revealed that he is supreme God.

LIFE TRANSFORMATIONS

Bhagwan Swaminarayan transformed the lives of all who sought his refuge. He removed evil and ego from the hearts of people and filled them with noble virtues. He inspired them to give up their swords and weapons and say *malas*. He transformed them from within, destroying their lust, anger, envy, greed, ego and other evil traits.

For example, in just a single encounter, Bhagwan Swaminarayan transformed the evil, vain and wayward tantric Magniram, such that he accepted initiation into the sadhu-fold. He was renamed Advaitanand Swami.

Many were already spiritually inclined, but lacked the guidance of a true guru to clear their confusion. On meeting Bhagwan Swaminarayan, such aspirants realized his divinity and sought his refuge. For example, the learned Dinmani Sharma became a sadhu and was named Nityanand Swami.

A businessman of Div survived a storm at sea and on learning that Swaminarayan had

succeeded Ramanand Swami, came to test his omniscience. Maharaj revealed the businessman's own thoughts to him through a boy and convinced him of his all-knowing nature. The businessman, too, became a sadhu and was named Prabhanand.

Gaja Gadhvi was a youth from Methan. He came for Bhagwan Swaminarayan's darshan at the home of Muljibhai in Memka. On seeing two people enter *samadhi* merely by Maharaj's gaze, Gaja Gadhvi was convinced of Maharaj's divinity. He also became a sadhu and was named Purnanand Swami.

During a procession in Junagadh, a poet was drawn by Maharaj's divine *murti*. Maharaj noticed him and threw him a gold-laced scarf. The poet was overwhelmed and walked along with the procession singing verses describing worldly detachment. Shriji Maharaj said to him, "Your understanding will not survive in worldly life." The poet was moved by Maharaj's words and became a sadhu. He was named Devanand Swami.

Mulu Khachar was addicted to *afeen* (opium), but agreed to accompany some fellow Kathi Darbars to Vartal with Shriji Maharaj for darshan. There, devotees noticed Mulu Khachar engaging in his addiction and commented, "Although he has come with the Kathi devotees, he does not seem to be a *satsangi*." When Mulu Khachar learnt about this he was so upset with himself and his habit that he broke his *hukko* and vowed never to take *afeen* again. Thus, in the company of Shriji Maharaj's devotees, Mulu Khachar's life was transformed. In this way, Shriji Maharaj created a society of pious people who in turn helped others to overcome their bad habits.

Macha Khachar of Kariyani was a devout *satsangi*. However, once, angered by his nephew, Vasta Khachar, he threatened him with a sword. The situation was quickly brought under control, but Shriji Maharaj rebuked him and reminded him, "Your true identity is the *atma* and the feelings of the body are false. This vil-

lage of Kariyani and the name of Macha are temporary." This teaching so touched Macha Khachar's heart that he renounced and became a sadhu. He was named Achintyanand Swami.

Joban Pagi of Vartal was a feared dacoit whose notoriety and influence stretched all the way to Kolkata. He tried for three nights to steal Shriji Maharaj's pedigree horse, but during each attempt he saw multiple forms of Maharaj besides each horse in the stable. He realized Maharaj's glory and came to the assembly for darshan. Maharaj called him by name and invited him to sit at the front. Joban's cruel life flashed in front of him and he realized the errors of his sinful ways. He fell at Maharaj's feet and begged forgiveness. Maharaj had ignited the spiritual spark latent in Joban Pagi. From that moment on he spent the rest of his life in the service and devotion of Shriji Maharaj.

There are countless such examples in which, by the company of Shriji Maharaj, the hearts of aspirants became filled with the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti.

PIOUS SADHUS

Bhagwan Swaminarayan established a cadre of pious sadhus whose resolve he examined by issuing strict observances and codes. He frequently changed his instructions, sometimes giving orders which seemed illogical. However, the sadhus were sincere and committed in their devotion and service. They strictly observed the five vows of *nishkam*, *nirlobh*, *nisswad*, *nirman* and *nissneh*. These celibate sadhus, and especially the seniors, such as, Aksharbrahman Gunatanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and Shukanand Swami, added to the glory of India's spiritual tradition.

These sadhus also contributed significantly to the literature of Gujarat. Impressed by their contributions, the renowned poet Nahnalal commented, "The devotion of Premanand, the yogic

knowledge of Gopalanand, the detachment of Nishkulanand and the verses of Brahmanand all enhance the glory of India's ancient tradition of sadhus." He added, "The verses of Brahmanand make one forget those of poet Bhoja, while compared to the devout bhakti verses of Premanand, those of Dayaram pale into insignificance."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan gifted society with such virtuous, wise and talented sadhus.

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN'S LOVE FOR HIS DEDICATED DEVOTEES

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's devotees were also similarly devout and dedicated. He tested them and also showered them with love. Such was their faith that countless believed him to be the manifest form of God.

The sacrifice of Dada Khachar surpassed even that of King Bali. Dada Khachar gave everything he had and served Bhagwan Swaminarayan as a humble servant. Other members of his family also willingly sacrificed everything and served Shriji Maharaj. The entire family instantly agreed to give the southern section of their *darbar* when Maharaj wished to build a mandir in Gadhada. When he asked Panchuba to gift her room in the *darbar*, she willingly agreed, saying, "It is my great privilege to do so. We will go to live elsewhere." Pleased by her sacrifice, Shriji Maharaj blessed, "Your renunciation is greater than that of Rantidev and Ambrish."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan described Parvatbhai and Gordhanbhai as 'true *satsangis*' and added, "In all three states they have constant darshan of my *murti*."

Sundarji Suthar was a minister in Kutch and a dedicated devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Once, he was leading the prince's marriage procession to its destination, when he learnt that Maharaj was in a nearby village. So, he went for Maharaj's darshan. Maharaj asked, "Who has come?"

"I, Sundarji, your servant," he replied.

"What is the characteristic of a servant?"

"To do what the master says."

"Then I instruct you to shave your head and become a sadhu," Maharaj commanded.

Immediately, Sundarji called a barber, had his head and face shaved and accepted initiation.

Then Maharaj told him to go to Kashi. And as he prepared to leave, Muktanand Swami intervened, "Maharaj, he is leading the prince's marriage party, and you have made him a sadhu." So, Maharaj then told Sundarji to again don his normal attire. Such were the tough tests of Maharaj.

On another occasion he sent a note to 18 prominent householder devotees and instructed them to become sadhus. Among them, Kalyanbhai of Kadu left midway through his marriage ceremony and became Adbhutanand Swami.

Such was the willing dedication and sacrifice of the devotees. Pleased by their devotion, Maharaj blessed them with his divine love and protected them from misery.

Naja Jogia of Lakhanka was harassed by his fellow villagers for worshipping Bhagwan Swaminarayan. So he went to live in Bhoyra. There, the chieftain, Vasur Khachar, was very cruel. He mercilessly broke the knees of innocent people. He objected to Naja Jogia's worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and so angrily threatened, "Where is your Swaminarayan?"

"In Visnagar," Naja replied.

"Wherever he is, if he is truly God then let him be present here by tomorrow morning. Otherwise, I will break your knees."

Naja's pleas for understanding fell on deaf ears. Fearful of the impending punishment, he prayed to Maharaj. The next morning, to Naja's great surprise and delight, Shriji Maharaj arrived to protect him.

Once, a poor, yet intensely devout, couple in Upleta wished for Maharaj to grace their home. But they did not have the means. However, Maharaj realized their wish and made an impromptu visit. The couple was overjoyed, but

did not know how to receive Maharaj. He told them not to worry and thus took some milk in a cup and began to drink while leaning against a pillar. The devout couple was lost in this divine darshan. Maharaj often showered his affection on the devotees in this way.

Regardless of their social background, Shriji Maharaj accepted the devotion of all devotees and in return showered them with his divine blessings and love.

SHIKSHAPATRI:

CODES FOR INNER AND OUTER PURITY

To guide his sadhus and devotees and ensure that they remain pure in their actions, diet, thoughts and social duties, and attain spiritual greatness, Bhagwan Swaminarayan presented them with the Shikshapatri on Maha *sud* 5 (Vasant Panchmi) Samvat 1882 (12 February 1826 CE). In 212 *shlokas*, he specified the codes of conduct for all sadhus and devotees. To emphasize daily study of the Shikshapatri by all, Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, “Believe these words as my form and observe them.”

Today, the Shikshapatri has been translated into many languages and inspires many devotees throughout the world.

In the Shikshapatri, in addition to the personal, family and social codes, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stated the ultimate spiritual objective for all: to become *brahmarup* and offer devotion to Parabrahman.

In this way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan guided his devotees towards happiness in worldly life and *moksha*.

TEACHING THE PURE UPASANA

Bhagwan Swaminarayan extracted the essential teachings of the Hindu shastras and presented them in a simple, practical way to his sadhus and devotees. He taught the philosophy of five eternal realities: *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman (Vachanamruts Gadhada I 7,

Sarangpur 5, Gadhada III 10 and others).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed that he himself was the manifest form of Parabrahman and countless people experienced his divinity and believed him to be supreme God.

He also emphasized that a *jiva* can only offer true, pure worship to Parabrahman after attaining the state of *brahmarup*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed that only by the association of Aksharbrahman (Brahman) can *jivas* become *brahmarup*. He identified Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest incarnation of Aksharbrahman and that he himself resides in him fully. And so, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stressed that the Gunatit Sadhu should be served in the same way one serves God.

This pure *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was spread by Gunatitanand Swami. Thereafter, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj continued to teach this understanding. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the present manifest form of Aksharbrahman through whom Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan is manifest, also, on the basis of this philosophy, inspires all to progress on the path of *moksha*.

SUCCESSION OF GURUS

‘*Sampradāya gurukramaha*’ – a *sampradaya* is one which has an unbroken succession of gurus. Monier Williams explained that a *sampradaya* is one in which “the established doctrine is transmitted from one teacher to another.” Establishing such a tradition, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stated that he would remain ever-present on earth through the succession of God-realized Sadhus. He revealed Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami as the first in this succession, saying to him, “I eternally dwell in you.”

Gunatitanand Swami identified Bhagatji Maharaj who, in turn, revealed Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj revealed Yogiji Maharaj, saying, “I am Yogi, and Yogi is me. There is no difference at all between us.” To help in teaching

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's spiritual principles to devotees of all ages all over the world, Yogiji Maharaj introduced the Sunday *sabha*, and established children and youth forums.

In 1950 CE, Shastriji Maharaj, having observed and tested his special skills and saintliness, appointed 28-year-old Shastri Narayan-swarupdasji as president of BAPS in his place.

After Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham in 1951, Pramukh Swami served under Yogiji Maharaj. Since Yogiji Maharaj passed away

to Akshardham in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has tirelessly endeavoured to inspire Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings in the lives of many.

Thus, over the past two centuries, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's succession of God-realized Sadhus have continued to spiritually guide and inspire countless onto the path of *moksha* revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ♦

- Translation of extracts from an article in Gujarati by Dr A.C. Brahmabhatt in Swaminarayan Prakash (monthly), April 2010

(Contd. from pg. 4)

Gopalanand Swami was an accomplished *ash-tang* yogi. Brahmanand Swami was a royal poet. Nityanand Swami was an illustrious scholar of Sanskrit and Hindu shastras whom no one could defeat in a debate. Nishkulanand Swami was an icon of *vairagya* (material detachment) and his kirtans inspired *vairagya* in others. Vyapkanand Swami rejuvenated a dead mare. Each one of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's sadhus were worthy of worship like the gods. But they had given up their ego and scholarliness to remain as servants of Shriji Maharaj. In spite of them all having such miraculous powers they did not display it to others, but inspired others to take refuge in Shriji Maharaj, explaining that he is God and the dispenser of *moksha*.

There are many such accomplishments of Shriji Maharaj. One of his greatest works was his contribution of the Vachanamrut, which contains

his spiritual and philosophical discourses. It is believed to be the essence of all the Hindu Shastras – the four Vedas, 18 Purans, Itihas (Ramayana and Mahabharat) and the six Darshans (philosophies). He taught that only God and his realized Sadhu can bestow ultimate *moksha* to all *jivas*. When one meets God or his bonafide Sadhu and one deeply attaches oneself (*atmabuddhi*) with him and obeys his words, one becomes *brahmarup* and liberated. The essence of the Gita is included in that [statement]. Shriji Maharaj incarnated on earth and explained this truth to us. And in his tradition of spiritual successors we have Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. They, too, performed such wonderful works. So, let us have trust, faith and a deep bond (*atmabuddhi*) with them to offer our profound bhakti.

In conclusion, Shriji Maharaj incarnated on earth to reveal the path of *moksha* for countless *jivas*. ♦

(Translated from Swamishri's blessings in Gujarati)

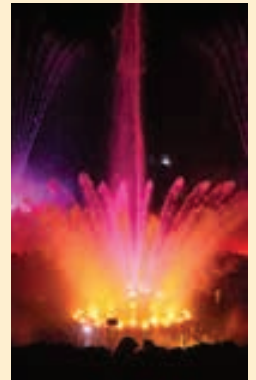


SAT-CHIT-ANAND WATER SHOW ANNOUNCEMENT

Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar

The Sat-Chit-Anand Water Show at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, will remain closed from 19 to 31 March 2012 for maintenance. We apologize for any inconvenience due to this temporary closure.

Please note that the rest of the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in Gandhinagar will remain open during this period, except for Mondays.



Liberator of the Downtrodden Classes



Bhagwan Swaminarayan visits the home of Sagram Vaghri and accepts his devotion and hospitality

INTRODUCTION

In his brief lifespan of 49 years Bhagwan Swaminarayan established the Swaminarayan Sampradaya in consonance with the ideals of Sanatana Dharma. Like all the previous avatars he rejuvenated the morally and spiritually moribund society in India, and repaired the fraying fabric of Hindu spiritual traditions. Furthermore, he established Ekantik Dharma (a combination of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*) for the ultimate liberation of countless souls.

Besides his main thrust on spiritual activi-

ties he also uplifted society from the prevailing morass of superstitions, violent *yagnas* and unethical customs, like widow burning, female infanticide and discrimination against the downtrodden classes. He emphasized upon imbibing values and virtues in life rather than being arrogant and disdainful to people of inferior classes and positions. His all-encompassing approach for the good of all, regardless of caste or race and sect distinctions, has been chronicled and lauded by prominent historians and writers like K.M. Munshi,¹ Nahnalal Kavi,² Kishorlal

1. "Being a Brahman [Brahmin], a versatile pandit, a staunch Vaishnav and an ideal sannyasin, the sadhu-cum-reformer added a great enlightenment to the culture of Gujarat by his life and living. A representative of a last religious era was reappearing on the threshold of the nineteenth century." Munshi, K.M. *Gujaratni Asmita*, p. 63.
2. "Great men sprinkle our world with their immortalizing nectar. Swaminarayan revived Gujarat by sprinkling his life-rejuvenating nectar. What did Swaminarayan do? Shriji Maharaj cleansed Gujarat with the waters of river Sarayu and bestowed it with his divinity. He was like the dawning sun in the new era." Kavi, Nahnalal D. *Kavishwar Dalpatram, Kavya Diksha*, Part 1, 1st edition. 1933.

Mashruwala³ and others. Bhagwan Swaminarayan carried out his mission peacefully and with great care and love. He did not break the Hindu tradition of *varnashram* but inspired those who were of lower caste to live a life wedded to morality and faith in God.

We shall briefly see some examples of his noble work in elevating the lives and character of people belonging to the lowest rung of Indian society.

Today, the effect of Swaminarayan Satsang is evident in Harijans residing in the villages of Karchiya, Bajwa, Sankarda, Poicha, Bhadarva, Vasna, Kotariya and others.⁴

The Asiatic Journal (First Series) published in London in 1883 (Volume XV, pp. 348-349), noted Bhagwan Swaminarayan's success in morally reforming the lives of countless people in Gujarat, "In his lifetime, the most intelligent people in the province, while they regretted (as Hindus) the levelling nature of his system, acknowledged their belief that his preaching had produced great effect in improving the morals of the people."

TEJABHAI OF CHHANI

The nondescript village of Chhani is nestled near the city of Vadodara. In the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan Tejabhai, a weaver (Vankar) who belonged to the lowest caste, lived in Chhani. Soon he became a Swaminarayan devotee through the association of Swaminarayan sadhus. His influence spread in the village and many more from his caste adopted the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. They all followed the

moral and spiritual codes of the Sampradaya and started living a pure life.

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Chhani while he was on his way from Vartal to meet the king, Sayajirao Gaekwad II, in Vadodara. The Harijan devotees welcomed Bhagwan Swaminarayan on the outskirts of their village. Prior to that, the leading lights of the village had announced to the upper caste population of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas not to go for Swaminarayan's darshan because he was with the Harijans. So, only members of the Harijan community had gathered for darshan on the outskirts. Bhagwan Swaminarayan was pleased by their profound love and devotion. He blessed them, "You will be blessed with the scholarliness and virtues of Brahmins. Even the Brahmins will feel ashamed by your moral standard of living."⁵ Time soon proved the truth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's blessings. The Harijans of Chhani practiced the sterling values prescribed in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. An incident from their lives testifies to their true adherence and faith for Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

It happened sometime between 1830 and 1850. A few high-ranking citizens of Vadodara filed a complaint against Tejabhai and others of his community in the city court. They accused them of not doing their duty of sweeping the city streets as mandated by the royal authorities. The court summoned Tejabhai and a Brahmin official questioned him, "Why don't you sincerely perform your street-sweeping duties?" Tejabhai humbly, but truthfully asserted, "Saheb, I am a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan therefore I

3. "Bhagwan Swaminarayan's method of culturalizing the lower castes was of a different type. His reforms were not to mix people of higher castes with the lower castes and thus produce low morals in higher caste people, but to raise the lower caste people by inspiring the values of higher caste people. That is why he taught the Harijans, cobblers, carpenters and *kanbis* the pure lifestyle of Brahmins. He taught them to refrain from eating meat, drinking liquor and unfiltered water and milk. In addition he asked them to abstain from eating onion, garlic and *hing* – these were the Swaminarayan values." Mashruwala, Kishorlal. *Sahajanand Swami Athwa Swaminarayan Sampradaya*, 2nd edition, Ahmedabad: 1940. Navjivan Press, pp. 63-64.

4. Panjwani, Mulji Chhagan. *Sahajanand Swami Athwa Swaminarayan Sampradaya*. Gadhadra: 1980, Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, pp. 148-149.

5. Dave, Prof. Ramesh. *Sahajanand Charitra*. Ahmedabad:1993. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, pp. 114-115.

will not lie. It is our Lord's command to wake up before sunrise between 4.30 and 5.00 a.m. Thereafter, I and members of my community bathe and perform our daily meditation and puja. Then before sunrise we go to sweep the streets. By the time others wake up we finish our work and return home to wash and engage ourselves in devotion to God. Because the citizens wake up late they never see our presence."

The Brahmin official was surprised to hear that these low caste workers lived a noble, religious life on par with virtuous Brahmins. The *tilak-chandlo* on Tejabhai's forehead convinced the official of his honesty and sincerity. He was deeply moved by the humility, purity and solemn sense of duty of the Harijans.

On another occasion, a marriage ceremony was taking place in the house of a local Brahmin official. Unexpectedly, at that time a close relative of the official died. The marriage ceremony was instantly called off. Consequently, lunch prepared for all the guests was left uneaten. The local Brahmin official called Tejabhai and asked him to take it all away for his community to eat. But Tejabhai replied, "Forgive me, but we cannot eat your lunch." The Brahmin official was taken aback by his words. He wondered how a low caste Harijan could reject his food.

The official shot back, "How can you say that you cannot have our food when your community eats our scrappings!"

Tejabhai clarified, "According to the rules prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his Shikshapatri we prepare our meals after filtering and cleaning water, milk, flour and other things. Then we offer the cooked food to the *murti* of God and eat it. The food materials used in your feast are not filtered and not offered to God, so there is no purity. This is why it is unacceptable to us."⁶

The Brahmin official offered his kudos to Te-

jabhai and the Harijan fraternity for upholding such high morals and pure food disciplines.

HARIJAN CALLED GOVA OF JUNAGADH

Two hundred years ago the town of Junagadh, Gujarat, was under the sovereignty of a Muslim ruler. The appointed Nawab (chief) and his ministers were running the state affairs. One of his ministers, appointed for collecting taxes, was a Nagar Brahmin. He cites an experience from his own house with regards to the character of a Harijan devotee. His wife gave *kadhi* (curry made of gram flour, buttermilk and spices), which was left over after dinner, to a Harijan named Gova. In reply, Gova said, "Mother, I cannot eat your *kadhi*."

"What do you mean by that? Have you superceded us [in context to caste]?" the lady rebuked him.

Gova answered, "We do not believe in distinctions of higher and lower castes since we are devotees of Swaminarayan. Please be happy upon me. Whatever I say is not to insult you. Because you are a Nagar Brahmin, who are all inclined towards tasty foods, you add chutney containing garlic in your *kadhi*. We, however, do not eat garlic and onions, so we cannot eat your *kadhi*." The Nagar official, seated inside his drawing room, was listening to the dialogue between his wife and Gova. He hurriedly came out. He met Gova and was impressed by what he said. He asked Gova to tell him more about himself. Gova explained, "I go to clean the precincts of the Swaminarayan Mandir sanctified by Gunatitanand Swami, who is a great sadhu of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. I help the sadhus clean the mandir and also listen to their spiritual discourses. So whatever I am is due to them." The official declared, "Gova, from now onwards there is no need for you to clean up dirt and human faeces. I appoint you as the supervisor of all

6. Vaghela, B.G. *Bhagwan Swaminarayan Samkalin Lokjivan*. Ahmedabad: 1984. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 4th edition, p. 210.

[the cleaners in town]. I will give you a house on behalf of the royalty. Stay there and do bhajan.”⁷

There are many such stories of low caste and other devotees who had upheld values preached by Satsang in their lives.

SAGRAM VAGHRI OF LIMLI

In the region of Jhalavad in Saurashtra, Gujarat, the story of Sagram’s transformation through his association with Swaminarayan sadhus surprised all. His notoriety for stealing, bullying and drinking binges in the region had branded him as very dangerous. So his sudden change of life astonished all.

Once, Sagram was travelling to some place. On the way he halted by a river to quench his thirst. Not far from him Shivram Bhatt of Shiyani also stopped to drink water. He simply cupped his palms, immersed them in the river and drank the water. On the other hand, Sagram took out a small copper vessel (*loto*). He washed it and then placed a cloth-filter over the vessel to rinse it again with filtered water. Finally he placed the cloth-filter again over the vessel and poured water into it. Sagram remembered Bhagwan Swaminarayan and drank the water. Shivram, who was watching all the while, was amazed. He was a Brahmin, yet he was unable to observe the purity that a low-born [Harijan] wedded to the ideals of Swaminarayan practiced, as if he belonged to a high caste.”⁸

JETHA KOLI OF TAD VILLAGE

The story of Jetha Koli, another low-born devotee, of Tad village has been chronicled in the pages of Swaminarayan history. He lived by the disciplines of purity similar to a Brahmin.

About 200 years ago an officer was on his round of observation on the outskirts of a village. He asked a Patel farmer, “Whose plough is

it?” The Patel replied, “It belongs to a Koli [low-born caste].” At that time only the well-to-do farmers could afford to harness oxen, so there was no possibility for people who were poor or low-born to own them. Thus the officer asked with surprise, “Can the Koli really afford the oxen?” Patel answered, “No one in the village has oxen like his.”

The officer went to Jetha Koli and asked him to verify what he had heard. Then the officer’s eyes fell upon a distant vessel. He asked, “What is it that you have beneath the berry tree over there?”

“Oh, it is a vessel containing water. There is an oval-shaped lid on it so that crows cannot place their feet on it.”

“But why is the small container (*loto*) placed away from the water vessel?”

Jetho replied, “When I go to answer nature’s call I carry water in it for washing purposes. And for drinking I have reserved another *loto*.”

The officer was simply amazed at Jetha Koli’s strict observance of hygiene.

Patel lauded Jetha, saying, “Sir, in this entire village only Jetho observes *ekadashi* (fast every 15 days). His clothes are clean and his character is spotless. None can compare with him. On the tenth day of each month he goes to the Swaminarayan mandir in the town of Una. On the following day, he fasts on *ekadashi* and engages himself in doing bhajan. The next day, on *dwadashi*, he ends his fast and returns home. Every morning he bathes, does puja and applies *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead and puts on a pair of white clothes.”⁹

For generations the Koli members used to fish to earn their living. It is difficult to understand how much effort Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his *paramhansas* had made in radically transforming them into moral people. Furthermore, it was a

7. Purani Premprakashdasji. *Satsangni Shubh Vartao*. Pt III. Rajkot: 1986. Swaminarayan Gurukul, pp. 67-74.

8. Vaghela, B.G. *Bhagwan Swaminarayan Samkalin Lokjivan*. Ahmedabad: 1998. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 4th edition, p. 207.

9. Sadhu Aksharpurushdas. *Krishnacharandas Swami nu Jivan Charitra ane Updesh*. Discourse 70. Junagadh, p. 25.

period of orthodoxy and severe caste discriminations. Despite these shackles Bhagwan Swaminarayan went to their ramshackled huts to redeem them from their vices and superstitions.

The book *Gujarat no Rajkiya and Sanskrutik Itihas* ('Political and Cultural History of Gujarat') describes how Bhagwan Swaminarayan uplifted the downtrodden classes, "The work of instilling character in the lives of the low-born classes by Bhagwan Swaminarayan was unparalleled. Sahajanand Swami's work in reforming low-born classes by inspiring values and uplifting them was very significant. The ideal Swaminarayan values of abstinence from liquor, meat, intoxicating addictions and the practice of daily bath, puja, not drinking unfiltered water and milk and others were instilled in them."¹⁰

A savant of Sanskrit, Durgashankar K. Shastri, notes, "He performed the great task of weaning the low-born classes of Gujarat and Kathiawad from meat-eating and killing and taught them the rules of cleanliness like bathing daily, and thus uplifted them. That is why in his times the British praised Swaminarayan to be great."¹¹

Well known scholar of Gujarati literature and history, Tribhovan Gaurishankar Vyas, describes an incident of Sagram Vaghri. The poor, illiterate Sagram Vaghri of Limli village defeated Shivrām Bhatt, a profound scholar of the Shrimad Bhagvat, in a spiritual debate. Subsequently, Shivrām took inspiration from his association with Sagram to become a sadhu. This seems to be an unbelievable phenomena, but it happened because of the grace and influence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Ishwar Petlikar notes, "During his time Bhagwan Swaminarayan, on the one hand, believed in the tradition of *varnashram* and he also believed in reforming the low-born classes by en-

riching their lives with the qualities of dharma, bhakti and *jnan*. He used to stay in their homes. He accepted their hospitality and became their guest. In spite of these devotees' reverence he behaved as if he was like a very close relative and a peer."¹²

Poet Narayandas, a Harijan and a Swaminarayan devotee, is renowned in the Sampradaya for his bhajans. His devotional lyrics are even sung today in Swaminarayan mandirs.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE LAWLESS NATURE IN LOW-BORNS

In culturalizing the low-born classes Bhagwan Swaminarayan achieved the important step of moralizing them and thus erasing their image of notoriety. It was because of their immoral habits and character that society was averse to them. Consequently, the marginalization and rejection from the upper classes left them jobless, which led them to practice unethical ways to earn their bread.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan endeavoured relentlessly to erase this stigma upon them. K.M. Munshi notes, "He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] eradicated the evils prevailing in society and spread morality. He also dissolved the prevailing practices of adultery and suffering in society. His efforts changed the immoral class of people into moral persons."

To understand his efforts in morally transforming people the examples of Sagram Vaghri and Govind Bhangi are enough. There was a time for Sagram during which his means of sustenance was stealing. But many years later, after his transformation, his wife told Sagram, "Why did you cover dust upon dust! Ever since I have met Bhagwan Swaminarayan I consider other's possessions as dust."¹³

10. Parikh, R.C. and Shastri, H.G. *Gujarat no Rajkiya and Sanskrutik Itihas, Maratha Kal*. Ahmedabad: 1981. Bhoje Sanshodhan Kendra, pp. 318-319.

11. Shastri, Durgashankar. *Vaishno Dharma no Sankshipt Itihas*. Mumbai: 1939. Forbes, p. 420.

12. Petlikar, Ishwar. *Shri Swaminarayan ane Adhyatan Hindu Dharma Pravah*. Mumbai: 1980. R.R. Sheth Co., p.38.

13. Sadhu Viveksagardas. *Yogiji Maharaj ni Satsang Kathao*. Ahmedabad: 1985. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, p. 111.

Another example of his edification of the low castes is that of Govind Bhangi. Govind found a gold chain while sweeping the palace grounds of the Nawab of Junagadh. He returned it to the Nawab's queen who was surprised at his honesty. In reply, Govind said, "I am a Swaminarayan devotee, and I cannot take anything that belongs to another."

Henry George Briggs, a British officer, speaks of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's amelioration of the low-born classes, "But the genius of Sahajanand Swami was not confined simply to the rigid re-establishment of Hindu worship in virgin integrity – it was also directed against the irregularities of the age, and to the recovery of thousands of those unfortunate men to be found throughout Gujarat, whose means of subsistence hitherto were equally lawless and precarious: of his success in this latter respect there is abundant testimony, from the vast hordes who have been reclaimed to honest and industrious pursuits – while the present undisturbed state of the country compared to its condition previously, will speak volumes for him..."¹⁴

The colossal effort of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in deconstructing the bad practices that had existed in some parts of society for decades and re-introducing the moral and spiritual ideals was no easy task. He faced a lot of opposition and flak for his philanthropy. His task in uplifting the lower castes was met with virulent rejection and barbs from some upper caste people of society. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his *paramhansas* strived unresigningly with a spirit of tolerance and ardour. Kishorlal Mashruwala writes, "He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] had endeavoured immensely in uplifting people of lower caste that other orthodox religious *sampradayas* seem to have found reason to oppose the Swaminarayan

Sampradaya because of its many disciples who were of the mason, tailor, carpenter, fishermen, cobbler and harijan sub-classes."¹⁵

NO NEED TO CHANGE ONE'S CASTE, BUT CHANGE ONE'S PERSPECTIVE

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's campaign to reform society of its ills was in fact rooted in the eternal principles of Hindu Dharma, that is, to inspire people in realizing that one is *atma* and not the body. By developing *atma*-realization one is able to foster *brahmabhav* (feeling of divinity) towards all. Furthermore he added that one should believe oneself to be *brahmarup* and offer devotion to Parabrahman (God). Bhagwan Swaminarayan imparted this transcendental knowledge in its simplest form to even the most ordinary of aspirants. Subsequently, he was able to dissolve the inferiority complex among the low-born people and the superiority complex among the higher *varnas* (classes) of society. This aspect of his work was mentioned in the journal, *History of Gujarat*.¹⁶

Bhagwan Swaminarayan once travelled to the village of Agatrai, near Junagadh. An assembly of sadhus and devotees celebrating Janmashtmi was in progress. At that time a Harijan boy was doing darshan of Shriji Maharaj from a distance outside the assembly area. Maharaj called him near and asked, "Who are you?" The boy humbly replied, "I am a Harijan." The words sparked off a ripple of commotion through the assembly. People responded with disapproving faces and bitter words for the boy. Shriji Maharaj educated the boy, "Say that you are not a Harijan but *atma*." The boy failed to comprehend, but he uttered what Maharaj had told him to, "Maharaj, I am *atma*." Shriji Maharaj made him repeat that he is *atma* ten times. Then he asked the boy again

14. Briggs, H.G. *The Cities of Gujarashtra*. Bombay: 1849. Times Press, p. 238.

15. Mashruwala, Kishorlal. *Sahajanand Swami athwa Swaminarayan Sampradaya*. Ahmedabad. Navjivan Prakashan Mandir, pp. 63-64.

16. M.S. Commissariat. *History of Gujarat: The Maratha Period, 1758 to 1818, Vol. III*. Ahmedabad, Gujarat Vidya Sabha, pp. 984-985.

who he was. The boy replied, “Maharaj, I am a Harijan.” Maharaj smiled at his answer. All the sadhus and devotees were observing Maharaj’s effort. Maharaj told him again, “Say again that you are *atma*. And say it in one breath as many times as you can.” Maharaj made him repeat it 100 times. Thereafter, Maharaj asked him who he was. The boy replied, “Maharaj, because you say so I am *atma*, but I am a Harijan otherwise.”

Shriji Maharaj looked at the congregation and said, “Look at this boy, because of his ignorance of true knowledge, see how much he is anchored to his body. He cannot give up his attachment or consciousness towards his body. Similarly, till you do not become detached from the belief that you are a sadhu, Kathi or Patel you are also like this Harijan boy. When this ignorance (*ajnan*) is dissolved only then will you realize that you are *atma* and live accordingly. Then you will not identify yourself with your caste or class, and you will perceive such bonds [of caste] as nescience. By elevating yourself to the state of *atma* all distinctions of high and low will dissolve and you will realize them to be due to one’s karmas. Subsequently, you will always

have compassion for the whole of mankind, be they high- or low-born.”¹⁷

The moral and spiritual tradition and the social services of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were continued through each of his Gunatit gurus. Presently, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami (Swamishri), the fifth successor, has fostered the uplift of people of all *varnas*. He has imparted and lived the message of social equality by visiting and blessing the hovels of Harijans, tribals and others. He often says, “There are no distinctions of high or low in the house of God. Such disparity has been created by people.” Swamishri has redeemed thousands of low caste persons of their inferiority complex and vices. Through his instructions his sadhus constantly travel in the tribal and socially backward regions of Gujarat to uplift them from the rut of addictions, ills and poverty. It is difficult to totally evaluate the contributions over the last 200 years of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus in uplifting the downtrodden masses. ♦

- Translation of extracts from an article in Gujarati by Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas in *Swaminarayan Prakash* (monthly), April 2010

17. Dave, H.T. *Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan*, pt. 2. Ahmedabad: 1991. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, pp. 259-260.

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I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2012



BHAGATJI MAHARAJ

In this issue of Swaminarayan Bliss we commemorate the 183rd Birthday Celebration of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj (7 March 2012) with a series of articles about his love for katha, divyabhav towards Gunatitanand Swami, sterling tolerance, obedience to his guru's words and the vision to see divinity in all.

A Passion for Katha

Sadhu Saralyogidas
Sadhu Dharmasetudas

THE DRIVE ELEMENT

We are driven by our goals – whether we are a student trying to perform well on an exam, an undergraduate pursuing a degree, an athlete working to excel in a sport or a businessman attempting to become rich. Every individual sets goals, develops a plan, and strives to achieve. Students study through the night, athletes practice even in the chilling rain and analysts tirelessly crunch the numbers of their portfolios. Yet, only a few reach their goals and become, by their own definition, successful. Why?

King Bhartruhari answers in his Sanskrit work, *Nitishatak*:

*Prārabhyate na khalu vighnabhayena nichaihi,
prārabdhavighnavihitā viramanti madhyāhā,
Vighnaihi punaha punarapi pratihanyamānāhā,
prārabdhamuttamjanā na parityajanti.*

Meaning, there are three types of people in the world: those who fail to even try because of the fear of having to face obstacles, those who try but lose heart when faced with challenges, and those very few who pursue and persist despite the harshest conditions.

All three types of people have talent, potential, a goal, and a desire to achieve, yet what differentiates one from the other? The difference is based on the element of desire. Whether or not people attain their goals does not entirely depend on their abilities or talents, but rather, on the in-



Gunatitanand Swami discourses to the
sadhus and devotees in Junagadh

tensity of their desire to reach their goal.

DESIRE

A person's persistence is directly proportional to the intensity of his desire. Take, for example, an overweight child who is forcefully bound to a diet. He is aware of the consequences of being overweight and has been warned and punished by his parents for not controlling himself. Yet, when everyone is asleep at night, he sneaks out of his room, goes to the kitchen, opens the fridge and takes a bite out of a piece of leftover chocolate cake. His desire to eat cake is so powerful that it overcomes all the warnings and suppresses all fears of being caught, reprimanded and punished.

In Vachanamrut Kariyani 10 Shriji Maharaj agrees when he states, "A person who has great zeal [desire] in any endeavour would never be hindered, even if he were to face thousands of obstacles." Those who succeed have struggled through difficulties, which may have at times, made their goals seem like intangible dreams. Regardless of the field and the technique – every success story shares this common element: the intensity of the achiever's desire to succeed. The significance of this crucial element is just as important on the spiritual path. Bhagatiji Maharaj's life bears testament to this element of success.

THE REALITY

Today we celebrate Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday with great enthusiasm. Hundreds of thousands of BAPS devotees all over the world say his *jai-naad* as they gather in mandirs to praise the qualities of Bhagatji Maharaj and to understand his true glory. However, one hundred and fifty years ago, Bhagatji Maharaj's life was not seen with the same glory.

No one said his *jai* and few considered his life as inspirational. On the contrary, Bhagatji Maharaj faced unimaginable humiliation. He lived at a time when social order in India chastised him as a mere tailor; and as a result, he often failed to receive the respect he deserved. For him, this was only an obstacle. The humiliation and contempt would not only continue, but escalate till the very end of his life.

Bhagatji Maharaj left his mortal body on Sunday, 7 November 1897. Just two years before, in December 1895, a group of devotees went to Mahuva to do Bhagatji Maharaj's *samagam*. On seeing the devotees pass through the village singing bhajans, a Brahmin devotee named Durgashankar became enraged. While Bhagatji Maharaj was on his way home from the mandir, Durgashankar verbally insulted him and slapped him in public. As if that was not enough, he followed him, constantly insulting him all the way to his home. Bhagatji Maharaj tolerated such humiliation even at the age of 66 – just two years before he returned to Akshardham. Facing insults was so routine for Bhagatji Maharaj that it became synonymous to his identity.

Adding to these circumstances, Bhagatji Maharaj was illiterate – he was barely able to sign his own name. He did not build or consecrate any mandirs, nor did he initiate youths as sadhus. Yet, under such circumstances, even devotees admitted and accepted Bhagatji Maharaj's immense spiritual progress. He was seemingly like a sparrow that had dared to fly at the height of eagles.

What drove Bhagatji Maharaj to become

spiritually successful? During Bhagatji Maharaj's time there were thousands of other devotees and sadhus who were of a higher caste, more respected, and better educated. Yet, a simple illiterate tailor who was constantly insulted and humiliated is still remembered today. Why?

A TRUE LISTENER

Bhagatji Maharaj's success lies in his insatiable thirst for knowledge. He quenched this thirst by passionately listening to spiritual discourses. It was a thirst he had even as a child.

In Mahuva, there was a local shrine which was looked after by Suryabharthi, the head priest. He was a devotee of Bhagwan Rama. Pragji Bhakta would serve him, help him clean the mandir, and then attentively listen to the stories he would tell of Rama. Suryabharthi was amazed by Pragji Bhakta's eagerness to listen, and would not begin his discourse until Pragji Bhakta arrived. While all the other children would be playing, Pragji Bhakta would be engrossed in listening to the head priest's narration. His enthusiasm for *katha* even gained him the respect of the elders.

As Pragji Bhakta grew older, his desire for *katha* continued to increase. He would regularly go to Vartal for the sole purpose of listening to Gopalanand Swami. In the process he developed such an interest in listening to Gopalanand Swami's *katha*, that in order to spend more time with Swami he would eat only chickpeas and gur, which he obtained from the village. In this way, Pragji Bhakta would return to Vartal every year and stay for two to three months at a time in order to listen to Gopalanand Swami's discourses.

Pragji Bhakta's intense desire to hear *katha* reached its climax when he left home to stay with Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh. For three-and-a-half consecutive years he stretched the limits of his human potential. He would fast for two days and eat only once on the third day. In addition, he performed rigorous physical *seva*; he would, among other things, help dig the foundation for

the *haveli*, carry heavy sacks of lime and crush lime with his bare feet. His work was equivalent to that of ten men. Yet, Pragji Bhakta's passion for *katha* was so powerful that during this time of intense *tapa* and *seva*, he would find time to listen to Gunatitanand Swami's discourses until three o'clock in the morning.

Even more amazing is the fact that his intense desire for *katha* was not short lived, but it remained throughout his life. Many times in Junagadh, Gunatitanand Swami would wake up at midnight and after washing his face, would talk until morning. At these times Pragji Bhakta would be one of the very few eager devotees who stayed awake to listen.

A DEVOTED SPEAKER

Pragji Bhakta also possessed a great desire to do *katha-varta*. After arriving in Junagadh in his search for inner peace, he immediately understood Gunatitanand Swami's true greatness. He once wrote a letter to the devotees of Mahuva and informed them, "Gunatitanand Swami is a great sadhu and his knowledge is worth acquiring. Come here to Junagadh, if you wish to be with him. If you do not, you will regret it in the future."

This letter marked the beginning of his lifelong mission to reveal Gunatitanand Swami's real glory. His deep passion for doing *katha-varta* began with a simple letter written to a few ordinary devotees and soon evolved into tireless, vigorous efforts aimed at embedding the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman in the hearts of all.

The consequences of his efforts presented more challenges. Bhagatji Maharaj faced great difficulties and tolerated undeserved insult and humiliation. Pavitranand Swami was amongst the many sadhus who were unable to accept Pragji Bhakta's discourses describing the glory of Gunatitanand Swami. After listening to him, he vowed to rest only when Pragji Bhakta was excommunicated from the Sampradaya. In Vartal,

when Gunatitanand Swami was told regarding the decision to excommunicate Pragji and Shamji, he objected, "Pragji is not to be blamed..." But Pavitranand Swami was firm, "Pragji spoke back to me in Junagadh. I have decided to excommunicate him and he will be excommunicated." For Pragji, it did not matter.

Even though Gunatitanand Swami was aware of Pavitranand Swami's ill feelings, he once asked Pragji Bhakta, "Will you be able to explain to Pavitranand Swami [my] true form?" This was a test of Pragji Bhakta's desire to spread Gunatitanand Swami's glory. Without the slightest hesitation, he replied, "I will, if it is your command." His eagerness revealed his unstoppable passion. Even though Pragji Bhakta knew that Pavitranand Swami's animosity for him was increasing day by day, even though he knew that the same person would become the cause of his ultimate humiliation, his drive took control. Despite the obstacles, he was willing to explain Gunatitanand Swami's greatness to Pavitranand Swami. His desire overshadowed everything.

As time went by, the circumstances surrounding Pragji Bhakta worsened exponentially. Because of his unstoppable zeal to do *katha-varta*, Bhagatji Maharaj suffered great humiliation. He was excommunicated from the Sampradaya. Letters were written to each mandir banning Bhagatji Maharaj from even entering. However, he did not turn away and give up satsang. Even amidst such adversity, Bhagatji Maharaj continued to reveal Gunatitanand Swami's greatness. Pragji Bhakta would sit outside the front gate of the mandir, near the stone arch beneath the *haveli* of the Nar-Narayan Mandir in Kalupur, Ahmedabad, and point towards Gunatitanand Swami as he passed by. He would announce with even greater enthusiasm, "Look! This is Akshardham walking!" His situation was a mere obstacle. It was an obstacle that would be overcome. Pragji Bhakta's enthusiasm remained unhindered and his desire remained undiminished.

Even age had no effect on him. Towards the final years of his life Bhagatji Maharaj continued to do *katha*. In 1894 in Ahmedabad, Bhagatji Maharaj's entire day was nearly engaged in delivering discourses. Bhagatji Maharaj would drench the sadhus and devotees with his profound *katha*. After awakening at four in the morning and completing his morning rituals, Bhagatji Maharaj would discourse in the assembly hall until *shangar arti*. Thereafter, he would continue his *katha* until noon, when he would break for lunch. Soon after, he would once again speak and then make his way to the afternoon assembly where he would discourse again. In the afternoon after four, Bhagatji Maharaj would continue *katha* until *sandhya arti*. After dinner and singing *cheshta*, his discourses would resume and continue until one o'clock at night, when Bhagatji Maharaj would retire for the night. *Katha* was his breath; it was his life. Even at the age of 65 Bhagatji Maharaj spent more than ten hours a day delivering discourses.

THE MESSAGE

From Bhagatji Maharaj's childhood until his final stages one element remained consistent – his unquenchable love for *katha-varta*. His desire for *katha* strengthened day by day and rendered all insults and difficulties as insignificant. When desire is powerful enough, it generates a force so great that it can accomplish whatever it is set upon. Bhagatji Maharaj's life demonstrated the strength of this dedication. Born as a mere tailor, in a humble house, in a simple town, he continuously faced circumstances that were against his favour. However, his persistence was able to transform the minds and hearts of even the greatest scholars and toughest opponents. He was able to leave such a profound impact that he is still remembered today, 180 years later. How is such an impossible feat possible? It is possible because of an unshakeable desire; a desire so strong, that we are still experiencing its fruits today. ♦

Divyabhav Towards the Guru

Sadhu Paramsevas
Sadhu Brahmatilakdas

You're flicking through the channels when you suddenly stop at a scene that catches your eye. It's a documentary on World War II. There are tanks scattered across the landscape. Countless dead bodies amid rivers of blood. The constant gunfire is pierced by the occasional silence. Two armies are marching forth in what may be the deciding battle. You want to continue watching, but apart from the gruesome scenes of violence you have no idea what is actually happening. That's because the narrator is speaking in French. Even with your high school basic French

class, you fail to understand what is being said. The actions make sense, but the words do not. You change the channel, but with little luck. It's a sign language programme. This time there are no words. But even the actions do not make sense. Frustrated, you turn the television off and go back to checking your messages.

What do both of these annoyances tell us? That words and actions can sometimes be beyond our comprehension. There are approximately seven thousand languages in the world. Most people can understand two, maybe three

or four languages at most. The gifted few can manage more, but they are a rarity. The same is also true of actions, or what we call body language. Hand gestures, mannerisms, and other signals can mean completely different things from country to country. A simple thumbs-up could mean you're showing your approval to a friend, looking to hitch a ride or be an expression of an obscene gesture, depending on where you are in the world.

If human words and human actions of this world

are sometimes difficult to grasp, then what can be said of words and actions that are not of this world? Shriji Maharaj once held a handkerchief in his hand and asked Muktanand Swami, "What is this?" Muktanand Swami replied, "Maharaj, it's a handkerchief." Maharaj contradicted him and said, "No, it's a sword." Maharaj asked him once more, "What is this?" Muktanand Swami, having learnt from his previous answer, replied, "Maharaj, if you say it is a sword, then it is a sword, and if you say it is a handkerchief, then it is a handkerchief." How are we to understand such words of Maharaj?

Shriji Maharaj once picked up a small twig and broke it into two. Muktanand Swami who was sitting next to Maharaj asked, "Maharaj, what did you just do?" Shriji Maharaj replied, "I just destroyed one universe, and at the same time, created another." To the human eye, only a twig was snapped in two. To the human ear, maybe a small cracking sound was heard. But the incredible sights and sounds that accompany the crashing of galaxies and explosions of stars were probably reserved for Maharaj only. How are we to understand such actions of Maharaj?



Bhagatji Maharaj mixes lime for use in the haveli construction

GOD IN HUMAN FORM

The answer to both questions is *divyabhav* – seeing divinity in the words and actions of God and guru. The problem is, we find it so difficult to keep *divyabhav* because both God and guru appear to be just like us. Shriji Maharaj mentions in Vachanamrut Gadhadra I 78, "When God assumes a human form, it is customary for him to behave in absolutely the same manner as humans do and not to reveal his transcendental powers." He looks like us, walks like us and talks like us. One would, therefore, reason that he is like us, but, he is not.

A person is out at sea, drowning in the high tide. A lifeguard seeing the swimmer in trouble jumps in to try to save him. The swimmer is thrashing away at the water, gasping for breath, panicking. Meanwhile, the lifeguard is crashing through the oncoming waves, trying to reach the swimmer as fast as possible. To a distant observer, it would seem that both are having a rough time in the water. But in reality, one is drowning and the other is doing the rescuing. We are drowning, God is rescuing.

Not only does he look like us, but he also acts like us in every way. In Vachanamrut Panchala 4 Shriji Maharaj lists twenty-eight different qualities that God may show, just like humans. The intelligence to realize he is different and divine is what Maharaj calls *divyabhav*.

He looks like us. He acts like us. Yet, he is not like us. It is enough to puzzle the greatest of minds. When it comes to spirituality, keeping *divyabhav* is incredibly difficult, but essential. This is why it took someone as spiritually intelligent as Bhagatji Maharaj, the ideal aspirant, to show us how to keep *divyabhav*. He never doubted anything Gunatitanand Swami said or did.

DIVYABHAV IN THE GURU'S WORDS

Gunatitanand Swami was in Junagadh. He turned to Pragji Bhakta and said, "Pragji, please go and call Mount Girnar. He has been performing penance for such a long time and today we want to grant him *moksha*." Bhagatji left immediately. The onlookers laughed sarcastically and remarked, "Pragji lacks sense. The guru may command, but naturally one should use discretion in following those commands."

Obviously a mountain made of stone cannot move let alone perform penance. The command sounds as ridiculous as being asked to call Big Ben or the Statue of Liberty. We often say that faith can move mountains. But that's in the metaphorical sense. Here, Bhagatji Maharaj's faith or *divyabhav* led him to consciously believe that Mt. Girnar would actually come. Bhagatji had no doubts. He did not hesitate. He followed the command not only in letter, but in spirit too.

In the year 1861, Gunatitanand Swami was having the old *haveli* in Junagadh demolished and constructing a new one in its place. On one occasion the furnace of lime was ready and Swami wanted to empty it. He told Pragji, "Please gather 200 spades and 500 buckets and keep them ready in the morning to empty the furnace."

Everyone present heard Swami's instructions. And everyone present knew that there were only a few buckets and spades in the mandir. But Pragji Bhakta agreed immediately and went to collect the ten to twelve spades and twenty-five buckets that were available in the mandir. When he returned, Swami asked him, "Have you brought all the spades and buckets?" Pragji Bhakta confirmed that he had.

Many sadhus who saw this began to comment, "Swami is lying and his disciple is also lying. There are not that many spades and buckets in the mandir."

Bhagatji heard this and he said to them, "Swami is omniscient and knows everything. He knows how many spades and buckets there

are in the mandir. I readily agreed because I did not want his words to be proved untrue." Calling Mt. Girnar or collecting some buckets and spades is fine, but when we are physically put through the acid test and he makes life difficult, it is hard to keep faith in the guru.

Pragji Bhakta's toughest tests were during the construction work for the new *haveli*. Work had already begun and different tasks were allocated to every sadhu. Gunatitanand Swami had formed groups of ten sadhus and devotees to dig the foundations for the new *haveli*. In Bhagatji's group however, there were only two or three sadhus. Seeing this as a challenge, Bhagatji happily worked with even greater effort. Swami smiled and was pleased to see his faith. As if granting a reward for keeping *divyabhav* in him, by Swami's grace Bhagatji's group only needed to dig some four feet before they reached a layer of solid black rock. The other groups, however, had to dig almost twelve feet. But keeping *divyabhav* wasn't always this easy.

Once the foundation work was complete, sand had to be washed, soaked in water and emptied into the foundation. Naturally, the clothes of whoever carried out this task would become wet and dirty, and so everyone made some sort of excuse and left. Swami noticed this and told Bhagatji, "Please complete this work by yourself." Bhagatji didn't falter and took it upon himself to finish this task.

The third and most hazardous of all tasks was to churn the lime mixture. The heat released in this process could crack the skin on one's hands and feet. Even worse, if this heat went into the eyes, there was a risk of blindness. The fear of this put everyone off. Swami summoned Pragji Bhakta and said, "Pragji, no one has come forward to prepare the lime mixture we require for the construction. They are all afraid that the lime will make the skin on their hands and feet crack and cause blindness. Please carry out this task. I will try to give you half a dozen people to help."

The *seva* was physically taxing even for a man with a strong build, let alone for Bhagatji's frail body. He had never done such hard work. He would have had to eat and rest well, if he was to complete the *seva*, but Gunatitanand Swami was thinking of something else. He called Pragji Bhakta and explained the need to perform austerities and physically weaken the body to please God. He then instructed him to fast for two days and eat only once on the third day, in the afternoon, and to refrain from eating sweet or oily foods. Swami would discourse with Bhagatji until 3.00 a.m. Then he would be allowed to sleep for only one hour in the *gorakh* posture, but not with his legs outstretched.

With little food and lack of rest, Bhagatji had a big task ahead of him. It seemed that every day Gunatitanand Swami was making it even harder. But he kept *divyabhav* in Swami. Where others would have failed, he tirelessly and enthusiastically persisted in this manner for three-and-a-half years.

DIVYABHAV IN THE GURU'S ACTIONS

Bhagatji's body was being pushed to dangerous limits. If the difficulty of the task itself was not enough, he had other hurdles to overcome.

Having accepted sole responsibility for the work, many were left amazed at his intense determination. However, those who were jealous of him wished him dead! To realize their cruel wishes, some of them would throw twelve-maund sacks of lime onto his back! An unimaginable 240 kilos! Quite literally, the work was back-breaking. Despite this, he kept his focus on Swami. He believed Swami was testing him. Never did he doubt why Swami had given him this *seva*. "If Swami is omniscient, then doesn't he know I will be harassed in such a cruel manner? Why has he given me such a difficult *seva*?" These questions and others like them never arose in Bhagatji's mind, even when life got tougher and when Gunatitanand Swami was unable to

save him.

There were many who opposed Bhagatji Maharaj to the extent that they excommunicated him from Satsang. There was no greater insult. One would question, was all that *seva*, *katha*, *sadhana* to please the guru, for this? But Bhagatji was firm. He knew that Gunatitanand Swami's actions were for the best.

Exactly how strong was his *divyabhav*? Bhagatji was excommunicated in April 1866. Almost one year later, in March 1867, Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami visited Mahuva. A dilemma arose when the raw ingredients to make the meals had not been sufficiently cleaned. That's when Bhagatji stepped forward and offered the flour and lentils from his own home. The Satsang may have excommunicated Bhagatji, but Bhagatji had not renounced Satsang. Gunatitanand Swami was forever in his heart. This is what is meant to have true *divyabhav*.

On another occasion Bhagatji and another *parshad* were washing utensils after a festival. All the dirty water had gathered in the big water pit. Swami came and stood beside it and said to Pragji, "Where could the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage possibly be?" Bhagatji understood the meaning of these words. He noticed that Swami's foot was touching the dirty water pit.

"The sixty-eight places of pilgrimage are found at the feet of the Satpurush," Bhagatji replied.

"If you really believe this, your endeavours are over," Swami said.

Surely he believed it, but who would jump into a pit of waste water with leftover food floating in it. When Bhagatji heard these words he dived straight into the water pit. He didn't just touch the dirty water to his head, but he bathed in it for quite some time. Due to Swami's touch it had become a place of pilgrimage for him. Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Vartal 7 that when worldly objects come into contact with God [or the *satpurush*] they become divine. But only someone with *divyabhav* can see this.

THE FRUITS OF DIVYABHAV

Shri Krishna Bhagwan reveals to Arjun in the Bhagavad Gita 4.9,

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।

त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोर्जुनः ॥

“*Janma karma cha me divyam...*” (“My birth and my actions are divine. He who realizes them as divine will attain me”). He tells us that whatever God or guru says is divine; do not doubt it. Whatever God or guru do, it is divine; do not doubt it.

Bhagatji Maharaj realized this, and that is why Pavitrnanand Swami can vouch, “He [Bhagatji] has attained the highest status in Satsang because of the difficult tests of faith he has been through and which he has passed.” Perhaps this is why when Gunatitanand Swami left this mortal world, he revealed, “I will move around in Satsang and reside in Mahuva.” That is, Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj are one. True, Bhagatji Maharaj was eternally great, but it seems his entire life was lived to prove Shri Krishna Bhagwan’s words true.

DIVYABHAV TODAY

If words and actions of this world can leave us confused, it is no surprise that we are often left scratching our heads on the spiritual path. Bhagatji Maharaj’s life is a beacon. He teaches us to not doubt what God and guru say or do. He has laid down the path, it is now up to us to follow.

The only difference is that the tasks have changed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj will not ask us to call Mt. Girnar, Big Ben or anything else for that matter. He will not ask us to bring 200 spades and 500 buckets. He will not give us *seva* where there is a chance that we could go blind or suffer injury. But, he will ask us to attend weekly *sabha*; he will ask us to give up our addictions and vices; and he will ask us to stay away from those who may distance us from God and guru.

We may or may not understand his words or actions, but then again we don’t understand many things in this world. If we keep *divyabhav* in him, everything will fall into place, and we’ll be able to please Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the same way Bhagatji Maharaj pleased Gunatitanand Swami. ♦



Imagine an individual who can heal a bite from a rabid dog. Imagine an individual who can cure cholera. Imagine an individual who made an illiterate Brahmin recite the Vedas. Imagine an individual who can see more than the physical eyes are capable of. Imagine an individual who is at the highest spiritual level and can also elevate others to that state. Imagine an individual who has all these powers and capacities but has never used any of them to dominate

or oppress others. Seems impossible, right? Now ask yourself, would such an individual with such powers tolerate abuses, insults and social prejudice with nothing less than the warmest smile from within? It seems hard to believe, because a person with such powers usually wields an ego proportional to his powers. Yet this was not so with Bhagatji Maharaj. Bhagatji Maharaj tolerated all the abuses hurled at him by people from all walks of life.

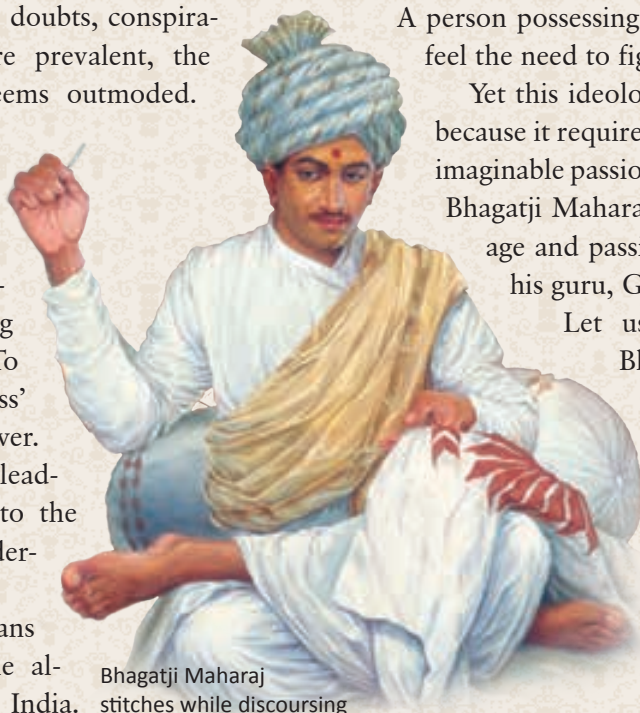
In a society where doubts, conspiracies and anarchy are prevalent, the idea of tolerance seems outmoded. Tolerance is an idea commonly associated with weakness. Those who are not capable of fighting back have nothing to do but tolerate. To show ‘who’s the boss’ is associated with power. This ideology is misleading. If we go back to the 1940’s we can understand why.

Millions of Indians collected through the alleys and streets of India. They stood united. A metaphorical wall was constructed against the British Raj. Its bricks were the people, and its cement comprised of non-violence and ahimsa. India’s citizens were beaten, trodden on, shot, sliced and gouged by the British Raj for resisting oppression. Yet that wall tolerated and refused to fall.

The Civil Rights Movement was a worldwide political movement for equality prior to becoming law between 1950 and 1980. In many situations it took the form of campaigns of civil resistance aimed at achieving change by non-violent forms of resistance. Change was brought into the world by tolerating, a form of ahimsa.

The truth is, to tolerate is a far more potent weapon than fighting back.

Fighting back is a sign of a bruised ego and a sign of panic. A snake only bites if it fears for its life. However, to tolerate, to not say a word and march valiantly on is a sign of fearlessness. One who is so determined in his ways and so focused on achieving his goal does not feel fear.



Bhagatji Maharaj
stitches while discoursing

A person possessing such integrity does not feel the need to fight back.

Yet this ideology is not easy to accept because it requires faith, courage, and unimaginable passion. This was exactly what Bhagatji Maharaj possessed: faith, courage and passion for one individual – his guru, Gunatitanand Swami.

Let us recall a moment in Bhagatji Maharaj’s life. Pavitranand Swami was a senior *sad-guru paramhansa* in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya who had been initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

“I will if it is your command,” were the words Bhagatji Maharaj uttered when Gunatitanand Swami gave him the *agna* to talk to Pavitranand Swami about his true form to be Akshar.

That very night, Bhagatji spoke about Gunatitanand Swami’s qualities while seated at Raghuvircharan Swami’s *asan*. He asked for Vachanamrut Gadhada I 71 to be read and proved that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar. Nearby, Pavitranand Swami was trying to sleep and was frustrated with having to listen to all these talks.

“O Pragji! It is midnight now. At least leave this topic of Akshar now! It is getting annoying,” he complained.

Bhagatji heard this, quietly came close to Pavitranand Swami, and whispered, “Swami, Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar. He is capable of making whoever serves him with thought, word and deed like himself and capable of winning over Shriji Maharaj.”

When Pavitranand Swami heard this, he became very angry. He banged his stick lying next to him and said, “How dare you have the audac-

ity to explain Swami's form to me!"

Pavitranand Swami was so enraged that he exclaimed, "See what happens to you! If I do not excommunicate you, then I am not Pavitranand."

This threat was carried out. Bhagatji Maharaj was excommunicated. To understand how big an insult this was, one must first see what made Bhagatji Maharaj's life. After spending thirteen years under the mentoring of Gopalanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj had naturally grown quite attached to him. As Gopalanand Swami arrived at the final moments of his life, he very adamantly insisted that Bhagatji serve Gunatitanand Swami. With a heavy heart Bhagatji Maharaj set out for Junagadh to be with Gunatitanand Swami, and as is the case with anyone who approaches the Satpurush, Bhagatji Maharaj never looked back.

Gunatitanand Swami became the person to rightfully fill the void in Bhagatji Maharaj's life. Bhagatji Maharaj with pure *mumukshuta* served Swami beyond the capacity of any mere mortal. As instructed by Gunatitanand Swami, he slept only one hour a day, he ate once every three days, he did back-breaking *seva* for twenty-three hours a day, he followed every *agna* to the letter, even if others deemed it ridiculous. Anything and everything Bhagatji Maharaj did, was for Gunatitanand Swami.

Bhagatji Maharaj's life was now centred around Gunatitanand Swami. However, the one individual who abhorred Bhagatji was the cause of his excommunication from the very Satsang that kept him close to his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. One individual was keeping him away from his life-line and making him an outcast in the only world he knew.

We ask ourselves, if we were in Bhagatji Maharaj's position, would we remain silent when faced with such mistreatment? Wouldn't we fight back? The answer is most probably yes, which is why Bhagatji Maharaj is different from the rest.

Bhagatji Maharaj did not think of fighting back. He stood resilient, like tolerance embodied. He stood fearless and declared, "If I have truly served Gunatitanand Swami and if Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar, then in the future I will sit with you, I will discuss this knowledge with you in its true form."

THE FORCE WITHIN

It requires an intense amount of mental strength and endurance to voluntarily tolerate abuse and insults. In fact, soldiers around the world are trained to become mentally strong, lest they face torture from the enemy. Yet Bhagatji Maharaj wasn't on any battlefield, so what was Bhagatji Maharaj's source of mental strength? His force of tolerance was generated from a different source of power. It was love. Love for his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. For him, every obstacle he faced in his life was not an obstacle; it was an opportunity to prove his attachment and earn his guru's *rajipo*. What we see as tolerating was in fact for him nothing of the sort.

PHYSICAL TOLERANCE

Due to Bhagatji Maharaj's insistence on proclaiming Gunatitanand Swami's true greatness, he received a letter of excommunication early in April 1866. He left Junagadh for Mahuva whilst Gunatitanand Swami was returning from Vartal. Sadhu Kunjviharidas, the *bhandari* (head of kitchen) of Junagadh mandir, opposed Bhagatji Maharaj's ways and out of malice packed Bhagatji some *ladus* laced with poison to eat along the way. Bhagatji accepted them, fully aware of his intentions. When he arrived at the Navli River near Savarkundala, he stopped to eat a little and then dug a deep hole in the ground and buried the rest of the food to prevent other animals from eating it.

The poison was so potent Bhagatji's entire body burned as if on fire. Through Maharaj's

grace, however, he digested it. Soon after, boils developed on his body and his skin began to peel. After a while, his throat burned and constricted and he could not swallow any food. His condition became serious and his elder brother, Narsinhbhai, called the village doctor to check his health. The doctor diagnosed that he had been given poison and said, “You will have to give me 200 rupees if you want some medicine to cure him.”

“I have mortgaged this property for 200 rupees! I don’t even have enough money to repay the mortgage, how can I possibly give that much to you?” Narsinhbhai replied. Bhagatji reassured him, “I do not need the doctor’s medicine, Maharaj and Swami will cure me.”

Bhagatji Maharaj was poisoned out of malice, yet he said nothing. His own brother hesitated in paying the medical bills, yet Bhagatji Maharaj said nothing. Why? Because, Bhagatji Maharaj redefined tolerance. He saw enmity, injustice, and oppression as opportunities to please and earn God’s and his guru’s *rajipo*; and as a result, by tolerating them, Bhagatji Maharaj earned his guru’s *rajipo*.

That very night, Shriji Maharaj gave darshan to Bhagatji Maharaj. Maharaj sat down cross-legged in front of him and asked Bhagatji Maharaj to lie down. He then gently passed his hand over his whole body and advised, “Boil one pound of black beans and put one rupee’s weight of ghee in it. Only drink that and nothing else.” Having said that, Maharaj disappeared. Bhagatji continued this treatment for two months and was cured. Bhagatji Maharaj’s definition of tolerance earned him God’s grace when death was imminent.

Whether it be having sacks of lime thrown on him, back-breaking labour, mixing slaked lime (a great health hazard) or washing utensils Bhagatji Maharaj endured it all because he saw this as a means to pleasing his guru, Gunatitanand Swami.

However, his lessons on tolerance didn’t stop there. For Swami, he endured not only physical, but also mental abuse.

MENTAL TOLERANCE

Bhagatji Maharaj was a tailor by caste. In the caste system, the tailor class fell in the lower strata, and as a result, were often an object of ridicule and abuse. Society had deemed that those of the lower strata were unable to walk the path of purity, let alone achieve total spiritual purity (to become *brahamrup*).

However, Bhagatji Maharaj never saw caste barriers as an obstacle, but as an opportunity in pleasing his guru. In fact, he used his caste as a tool to please his guru. When the society of his time saw the status of a tailor as insignificant, Bhagatji Maharaj used his trade skills to please Gunatitanand Swami. Acharya Maharaj was expected to come to the Fuldol festival in Junagadh in 1861 (V.S. 1917), so Swami asked Bhagatji to prepare a canopy that would cover the assembly hall. A canopy large enough for the assembly hall would normally cost approximately 1,000 rupees to make. However, Swami said to Bhagatji, “Pragji, there is no more money left. Do whatever you need to and make this large canopy.” Gunatitanand Swami’s commands were worth millions of rupees to Pragji Bhakta. He never failed to follow any of his commands and he truly believed that money would just flow, as Swami had made the command. Instantly, he set out to gather pledges in support of his work. He managed to collect 600 rupees just from the devotees who used to listen to his discourses. He then obtained some thick pieces of cloth and had them printed with floral designs and he earnestly began the tedious task of stitching. Within a short span of only 41 days, Pragji Bhakta had completed the work that would normally have taken ten tailors two months to complete. Bhagatji would wake up daily at 3:00 a.m. Once

he had completed his morning rituals, and after performing darshan of the *mangala arti* at about 6.00 a.m., he would sit down to work until the *rajbhog arti*, around 11.15 a.m.. Then after lunch, he would sit down again to work. He continued working until he went to sleep at midnight.

When Bhagatji was nearing completion of this large canopy with floral designs, Swami came to visit him and stood behind him. Bhagatji was stitching away, mentally lost in Swami's form while chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan'. Swami was happy to see his vigour and the way in which he was engrossed in devotion. Bhagatji Maharaj had utilized the cause of his humiliation to serve his guru.

THE VALUE OF TOLERANCE

Bhagatji Maharaj's tolerance established a guru-based principle of tolerance. He demonstrated that tolerance should not simply stand on the value of the virtue itself, but rather on one's intense love for the Gunatit guru. This message has been at the heart of the BAPS Sanstha's growth over its

104 years and the principle that has guided Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's efforts. Walking in Bhagatji Maharaj's footsteps, they have continued to tolerate for their guru to spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

Since becoming the president of BAPS, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has endured immense physical and mental hardships, always remaining humble and absorbed in quiet prayer.

The consequences of such tolerance are reflected in the rewards. With over 32 *shikharbaddh* mandirs on four continents, 1,000 *hari* mandirs, over 850 sadhus, and the utmost respect of dignitaries throughout the world – the voice of tolerance for one's guru can be heard louder than ever.

At its root lies, Bhagatji Maharaj's redefined tolerance. We too must march ahead in our sadhana, *seva* and *siddhant* by imbibing Bhagatji Maharaj's life message. To tolerate for the guru – this is true tolerance. ♦



INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2002 the Pentagon staged a war game called the Millennium Challenge. The purpose of this game was for the Pentagon to test a set of new and quite radical ideas about how to go to war. Up until Desert Storm (in 1991) war had been conventional. It was simply pure head-to-head military combat. However, the US now felt that war would take on a new

form. War would take place in cities as often as on battlefields; it would be fuelled by ideas as much as by weapons, and engage cultures and economies as much as armies. War would now be about taking apart your adversary's whole war-making system. For the Millennium Challenge the US and its allies were known as the Blue Team, which would be headed by the US military. On the other side, the Middle East en-

enemy was known as the Red Team, which would be headed by a retired US Marine Corps Lt. General. For this challenge the Blue Team was given an abundance of intellectual resources that broke the enemy down into a series of systems: military, economic, social and political, along with other information and intelligence from every corner of the US government. In spite of all this, at the end of the game the US military were speechless; the Blue Team had been demolished by the Red Team.

On the first day of the game the Red Team had totally evaded the Blue Team's sophisticated electronic surveillance network. On the second day when the Blue Team sent a surrender document to the Red Team demanding a response within 24 hours, the Red Team made a pre-emptive strike and bombarded them in an hour-long assault of cruise missiles. At the end of the attack they had destroyed sixteen warships. An equivalent success in a real conflict would have resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 American servicemen and women.

In the weeks and months that followed, there were numerous explanations from analysts about what happened. But none of these explanations changed the fact that the Blue Team suffered catastrophic failure. So how did this happen?

The Millennium Challenge was not just a battle between two armies but a battle between two perfectly opposed military philosophies. The Blue Team had their databases, matrixes and methodologies for systematically understanding the intentions and capabilities of the enemy. This system forced their commanders to stop and talk over and figure out what was going on. They would spend considerable time rigorously discussing and analyzing what the enemy may do and what

move would be best to make next.

On the other side the Red Team's philosophy was totally different. Everyone in the team was told to use their own initiative, be innovative and make decisions rapidly. During the fighting there were no long meetings and explanations. There was no getting caught up in any of the mechanistic processes used by the Blue Team. When a situation arose the Red Team simply stopped thinking and started acting. This was the secret to their success.

In satsang, we have a battle to fight as well – not against anyone else, but against ourselves. When it comes to following the Satpurush's *agna*, there are two choices. We have all the information. We can either analyze, or we can simply have faith in the Satpurush and do as he says. Bhagatji Maharaj was one who had total faith. And he ended up winning the battle, for it earned him Swami's *rajipo* and *brahmi sthiti*.

AGNAMA SUKH

In Shri Haricharitamrutsagar, Chapter 12, Verse 26, Shriji Maharaj says, "Believe my words to be *amrut*... my words give bliss."

Pragji Bhakta fully believed there was '*agnama sukh* – bliss in following *agna*'. Once, in Junagadh, the task of emptying lime from the furnace was allocated to the sadhus and *parshads*. Pragji would place baskets of lime on his head and run quickly across the compound to empty them. He would then return, refill them and repeat the process.

By 10.00 a.m. most of the sadhus and *parshads* had left giving some excuse or another. Only Pragji and about five to seven devotees remained. Swami noticed this and laughed. He said, "The sadhus have given up, but Pragji is still going strong." Pragji was working



extremely hard. He never stopped to analyze or to question. He did not think about his own bodily comforts; he ignored the heat and exhaustion; he did not look to see whether others were helping; instead, he toiled continuously for six days. Then finally, when Swami came to meet Pragji on the sixth day, Pragji told Swami how he was experiencing bliss by following his *agna*. He told Swami, “It is my great fortune that you are pleased with me. You have bestowed so much of your grace upon me. You have given me immense bliss of the manifest form of Bhagwan. Infinite universes are insignificant in comparison to you, yet you have descended in human form to fulfil my desires by giving me this bliss and by giving me this service. I have now become satisfied and fulfilled.” Pragji Bhakta followed Gunatitanand Swami’s *agna* without stopping to think about what was going to happen to him. By following his *agna* Pragji Bhakta experienced true happiness. Whether it was calling Girnar or watering withering mango trees, for him it was not to question why, but to follow Swami’s instructions implicitly.

RAJIPO IN AGNA

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 25 Shriji Maharaj says, “A *satsangi* should never falter in observing Bhagwan’s injunctions. Why? Because Bhagwan will be pleased with him, if he behaves accordingly.” It seemed as if Pragji Bhakta revolved his life around these words. He wanted nothing more than to please Gunatitanand Swami.

After the harvest in 1862 CE (V.S. 1918), all the sadhus returned to Junagadh. One day the mandir’s barber, Karsan, got upset and refused to carry out his job unless he received an extra two paise for shaving each sadhu. Swami refused and eventually dismissed him. As time went on, the sadhus became frustrated because their hair had been growing for over one-and-a-half months. They all considered calling the barber back and agreeing to offer him the wage

he requested. At that time Swami called Pragji Bhakta. “Pragji, do you know how to shave?” Swami asked. “Yes, Swami.” replied Pragji immediately. Having been given the *agna*, Pragji went out into the town and got some razors and scissors. He came back and shaved Swami’s hair first. Swami was pleased with him and embraced him twice. Realizing that Swami would be pleased if he took on the task of the barber, he continued to shave the sadhus’ hair for the following six months.

During Pragji Bhakta’s time, a person was looked at disrespectfully for performing duties beneath his own caste. However, Pragji Bhakta did not stop to think about what others would think. Instead, he was more interested in following Swami’s *agna*. For him, Swami’s *agna* was all that mattered; and the result, he gained Swami’s true *rajipto*.

BRAHMARUP IN AGNA

Following *agna* not only gives one happiness and blessings, but it also has the power to grant *moksha*. The ultimate goal in life is to become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti to Shriji Maharaj. Gunatitanand Swami has said in Swamini Vatu, “If a true God-realized Sadhu is attained and one does as he says, then the failings that would have taken tens of millions of births to overcome are overcome today and one becomes *brahmarup*” (1.119).

In 1863 CE (V.S. 1919) thousands of devotees gathered in Junagadh to celebrate the Holi festival. After the festival was over, Gunatitanand Swami distributed *fagva* as *prasad* to everyone. He did not see Pragji Bhakta and asked, “Where has Pragji gone? I want to give him *prasad* today, since he has put in such great effort.” Everyone thought that Swami would give Pragji a pair of Shriji Maharaj’s footprints or some of his sanctified articles as a token of his appreciation. However, when Pragji arrived Swami merely gave him the leftover unpopped kernels. Bhagatji ex-

tended his hands with great gratitude and went away smiling.

Manji Thakkar noticed this and remarked, “He must be crazy. He is satisfied with a handful of unpopped kernels. He should have asked for something more valuable, such as Maharaj’s footprints or some other sanctified object.”

As if Pragji had overheard him, he then turned back, came to Swami and said, “Swami, did you give me the sanctified *prasad* because you were pleased with me, or is the *prasad* the same as that you gave to others?”

Swami replied, “I gave you *prasad* out of sheer grace.” Pragji placed an unpopped kernel into his mouth and asked Swami, “Then Swami, has my lust been burnt away?” “Yes, it has!” Swami replied. Then putting six or seven kernels, one after another, in his mouth, Pragji asked again, “Have my anger... ego... taste... attachment... and other enemies been destroyed?” Swami was pleased and replied while smiling, “Yes, they have all gone.”

Gunatitanand Swami says in Swamini Vatu, “By following Maharaj’s command [one’s] vices are diminished” (13.24). Bhagatji was thus purified and Swami had taken him one step closer to becoming *brahmarup*.

Since Bhagatji had never stopped to analyze or question, he was able to act according to Swami’s

agna. That is why he experienced Bhagwan’s bliss and earned Swami’s *rajipo*. This was why Swami rid him of his vices and made him *brahmarup*.

In the monsoon of 1864 CE (V.S. 1920) Gunatitanand Swami bestowed his greatest grace upon Pragji Bhakta. Swami called him in private and said to him, “Please free yourself from all activities and sit in meditation. I want to give you the ultimate bliss of Bhagwan.” Swami took him to a room in the new guesthouse and asked him to sit in meditation. According to Swami’s instructions, Bhagatji meditated there for nine days. Then on the tenth day, Swami fulfilled the promise he had given him three years earlier, during the Holi festival in March 1861 (V.S. 1917). Swami transformed him. He blessed Bhagatji with God-realization and *ekantik* dharma. He made him *brahmarup*.

The Millennium Challenge is a battle between different philosophies. Bhagatji Maharaj followed each of Gunatitanand Swami’s *agnas* without analyzing or thinking about the consequences. He changed his thinking to that of his guru’s, and as a result, he won. To win the battle we call life, one only needs to keep faith in Swami’s *agna*, no matter how insignificant or incomprehensible it may seem. This is our Millennium Challenge. ♦



*Na kaschitkasyachinmitram na kaschitkasyachid ripu,
Vyavahārena jāyante mitrāni ripavastatha.*

Relationships do not originate by themselves, but are created through interactions with others. Thereafter, the progress of relationships is

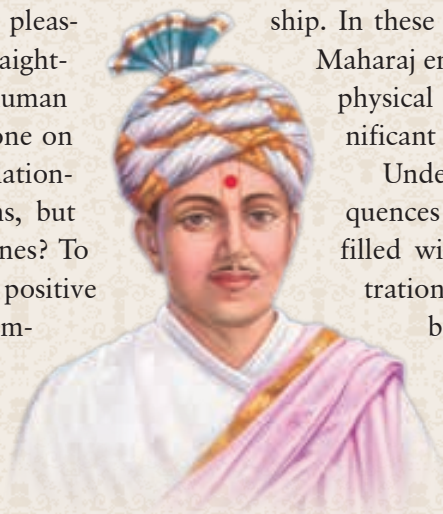
determined by how one adjusts and deals with others. Although creating a relationship with a friend is easy, maintaining it is often a lifelong endeavour very few are privileged to have experienced. Nevertheless, it is possible.

Maintaining relations in pleasant circumstances can be straightforward. A textbook or a human relations expert can educate one on the art of preserving good relationships in favourable conditions, but what about in unfavourable ones? To develop and maintain such a positive relationship with a foe is a seemingly impossible task.

To learn more about maintaining positive relationships in even the most unfavourable settings requires one to delve into the Satpurush's life. When we examine Bhagatji Maharaj's life we find that he had developed a positive relationship with people even under the most difficult circumstances. Bhagatji Maharaj, though innocent and loving, was subject to a great deal of animosity due to those envious of his elevated state of spirituality and relationship with Gunatitanand Swami. However, Bhagatji Maharaj transformed these negative relations into positive ones by not only forgiving and understanding others, but also understanding their greatness.

THE CENTRE OF ANIMOSITY

Bhagatji Maharaj was a frequent victim of verbal and physical abuse. He was ridiculed for removing a dead dog hindering the *haveli* construction in Junagadh. Some also deliberately threw heavy sacks of lime onto Bhagatji Maharaj's back with the sole intention of inflicting pain; while others spitefully questioned his intelligence for obeying Gunatitanand Swami's apparently nonsensical command to call Mount Girnar. As if this was not enough, on two separate occasions, Kama Sheth and Durgashankar physically humiliated Bhagatji Maharaj by slapping his face. Some had even made it their mission to evict Bhagatji Maharaj from the Fellow-



ship. In these and many other ways, Bhagatji Maharaj endured great mental, verbal, and physical harassment throughout a significant portion of his life.

Under normal conditions, the consequences of such abuse would be a life filled with depression, alienation, frustration, hate and revenge. It would be life without positive relationships.

However, Bhagatji Maharaj remained mentally stable in such situations. He never avenged the wrong done to him, but instead had the heart to forgive and forget, and consequently transform those who had wronged him. The results of his sacrifices are awe-inspiring. Foes that would go to any means to humiliate, condemn and ruin him were transformed into not only friends, but also admirers.

The analysis of two events will help develop a better understanding of Bhagatji Maharaj's lessons on developing positive relationships.

AN OFFERING OF GRAINS

Following Gunatitanand Swami's instructions, Bhagatji Maharaj boldly exclaimed Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar to many devotees and sadhus. One day, during a midnight conversation in Junagadh, Bhagatji Maharaj explained Gunatitanand Swami's true greatness to Pavitranand Swami, who found these words unbearable. Pavitranand Swami lost his temper and wrongly alleged that Bhagatji Maharaj had 'talked back' to him. On that fateful night, Pavitranand Swami resolved to use all his means to evict Bhagatji Maharaj from the Sampradaya. From an ordinary viewpoint his decision spelt ruin for Bhagatji Maharaj. Because of Pavitranand Swami's reputed position, influence, and unjust insistence, Bhagatji Maharaj was eventually excommunicated from the Sampradaya.

This did not disturb him, but what hurt Bhagatji the most was having to stay away from Gunatitanand Swami, his guru and only source of happiness.

The following days passed quietly. Then, in March 1867, Gunatitanand Swami and Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj visited Mahuva, Bhagatji Maharaj's village, with a group of over four hundred sadhus. For Bhagatji Maharaj the occasion was as momentous as it was inconsolable. His guru would come to his village, but he would not be able to serve him.

On the first day of their stay in Mahuva, the *bhandari* of the group of sadhus doubted the purity of the provisions that were given for Thakorji. He presented his concerns to Pavitranand Swami, who flatly refused the use of such impure provisions. This forced the *bhandari* into a dilemma. What would he use to make Thakorji's *thal* and how would he be able to feed over four hundred sadhus?

For Bhagatji Maharaj an opportunity to serve arose. When he received news of the *bhandari*'s problem, he eagerly approached him. He humbly offered provisions from his home, if they would agree to accept provisions from an excommunicated member. The *bhandari* rushed to Pavitranand Swami for his consent. Knowing there was no other alternative, Pavitranand Swami readily agreed, saying that although Bhagatji was excommunicated, his grains were not. Exhilarated, Bhagatji Maharaj quickly brought all the necessary provisions and assisted the *bhandari*.

Bhagatji Maharaj teaches a lesson that we rarely find in human relations textbooks. He demonstrates how to understand and unconditionally forgive others. He teaches that excommunication reciprocated with unconditional aid has the power to change even the most rigid of hearts.

Without such an understanding the consequences would have been drastically different.

The ordinary would not have even considered approaching the *bhandari* to offer provisions. One would surely reason, "Why should I help those who have wrongfully humiliated me? This is God's way of showing them who is right." And suppose if one did choose to help, Pavitranand Swami's justification for accepting the grains would have surely instigated a chastising response. An opportunity to serve would quickly turn into an opportunity to patronize. Bitter hatred and an ever deepening grudge would have fuelled the conflict.

This is what separates Bhagatji Maharaj from the rest. He understood that, though injustice had been committed against him, there was no peace in revenge. Even though Mahuva was his home, and its *satsangis* had immense respect and affection for him, he did not use them to degrade others. For Bhagatji Maharaj the situation became an opportunity to serve.

The consequences of his actions forced Pavitranand Swami to rethink his attitude; and as a result, planted the seeds for a positive relationship. Bhagatji Maharaj realized the circumstances gave him the opportunity to reopen a door that had been shut some time ago. Whether or not Pavitranand Swami admitted defeat, his heart had surely accepted defeat.

A REVOLT IN DABHAN

Bhagatji Maharaj's ability to maintain unconditional positive relationships with those who have opposed him was also reflected in Dabhan. In 1885 (V.S. 1941), Shastri Balramdas of Dabhan started trouble with the support of many devotees of Nadiad. Among many other things, he had convinced devotees to not send their donations to Vartal. This left Acharya Maharaj and the *kothari* frustrated: how were they to run the mandir without funds? They desperately searched for someone to resolve the issue. They knew that the devotees had great respect and devotion for Bhagatji Maharaj and would be

willing to do anything to please him. They knew that only he could resolve the problem without causing uproar.

Many opposed the decision to call Bhagatji Maharaj; however, out of sheer desperation, the *kothari* wrote a letter requesting Bhagatji Maharaj to urgently come to Nadiad. In the letter he asked him to resolve the situation in Nadiad by convincing the devotees to continue with their services in Vartal. When Bhagatji Maharaj received the letter in Mahuva, he immediately departed for Vartal.

It was January 1885 and the message of his arrival spread like wildfire. Devotees flooded to Vartal for Bhagatji Maharaj's darshan. The mandir once again began to bustle with activity. Acharya Maharaj and the *kothari* were pleased with the response that Bhagatji Maharaj had created. However, the attention and respect he was getting was unbearable for some. Unable to see the admiration of the devotees for Bhagatji Maharaj, they created chaos and forced Bhagatji Maharaj to return to Mahuva, leaving the turmoil in Dabhan unresolved.

Over time, the situation in Nadiad worsened. Out of great apprehension, Acharya Maharaj wrote another letter to Bhagatji Maharaj, requesting his help. In response, Bhagatji Maharaj arrived in Vartal for the Janmashtmi festival in September of that year. He warned the *kothari* that the revolt in Dabhan was almost uncontrollable. If something was not done soon, it would cause a great division among the devotees. Realizing the urgency of the situation, Acharya Maharaj and the *kothari* asked Bhagatji Maharaj to rush to Nadiad and convince the devotees to resume their services to Vartal.

At once, Bhagatji Maharaj left and stayed at the mandir in Nadiad for several days. During this time he talked to Balramdas, who had been the source of the problem, and convinced him to resolve his issues with Vartal. Through polite persuasion, Bhagatji Maharaj also convinced the

devotees to continue offering their services to Vartal and thus resolved the problem.

It is easy to offer a helping hand when it is rewarded with appreciation, but much more difficult to do the same when that hand is pushed back. Bhagatji Maharaj's ability to convince devotees and win over Balramdas is no doubt a testament to his ability to deal with difficult people; however, his ability to continue to help those that have humiliated and opposed him, is a quality that raises him above even the extraordinary. Despite being humiliated when he offered his help the first time, Bhagatji Maharaj returned with the same enthusiasm when asked by the *acharya* the second time.

His refusal to help would have been justified. After all, why should it matter to him if those who insulted and ridiculed him lost the devotees' support? If they didn't appreciate his support, then what is the point of helping them? For Bhagatji Maharaj it mattered. Because he forgave and understood, he was able to develop positive relationships.

For much of his life Bhagatji Maharaj was a victim of injustice. Any other person would eagerly wait for opportunities to take revenge. However, Bhagatji Maharaj worked toward developing positive relationships through forgiving and understanding.

More than just forgiveness and understanding, there was a deeper understanding motivating Bhagatji Maharaj's actions: his perception of people was different. Once when Kothari Gordhandas asked him the secret of his spirituality, Bhagatji Maharaj responded, "I see all as *brahma ni murti*." He saw each person as a pure soul in which God resides. When one sees others like this, then how can one see flaws in others? How then can one not work towards establishing positive relations under even the most difficult circumstances? This was Bhagatji Maharaj's advice to developing a successful relationship: see all as *brahma ni murti*. ♦

BHAGAVAD GITA, ADHYĀY 2, BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA Part 9

Shri Krishna informed Arjuna that

*‘Shrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati nishchalā,
samādhāvachalā buddhistadā yogamavāpsyasi.’*

– ‘You will attain yoga when your intellect, which
has become unstable due to hearing a variety of
words, becomes stable in samādhi’ (Gitā 2.53).

*Now let us take a look at what
Arjuna asked thereafter.*



CHARACTERISTICS OF A STHITAPRAGNA PERSON

Arjuna asked, ‘स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव।
स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत् ब्रजेत किम् ॥’ – ‘*Sthitapragnasya
kā bhāshā samādhisthasya keshava, sthitadheehi
kim prabhāsheta kimāseeta vrajeta kim.*’ – ‘O
Krishna! What are the characteristics of a stable
minded person? In what way does such a person
speak? In what way does he sit? In what way
does he walk?’ (Gitā 2.54).

This is Arjuna’s aspiration, his hope, his
prayer. This is not a question asked for the sake
of asking. Some have a habit of asking questions,
but not Arjuna. Some have a hobby of just gathering
information; they like to know new things
and increase their information bank by asking
question after question. However, Arjuna is genuinely
interested; he is a spiritual aspirant. Just
like the ill crave for a cure, Arjuna’s intense craving
is evident here. At this time he is distraught
by the unsteady state of his mind. He desperately
wants to be freed from this distress. Moreover,
Shri Krishna has already told him to attain unwa-

vering conviction in the form of Paramātmā (see
previous article, *Swaminarayan Bliss*, pgs. 10-
14). He has told him to become a true yogi and
to focus his mind on the form of Paramātmā. Ar-
juna wants to become such a yogi and attain such
a state of *samadhi* in which his mind is steady on
the form of Paramātmā. Thus, his wish is natu-
rally revealed in the form of this question.

Based on grammatical derivation, the word
‘*sthitapragnaha*’ means ‘one whose intellect
is steady’, ‘*samādhisthaha*’ means ‘one who is
stable in *samādhi*’ and ‘*sthitadheehi*’ means ‘one
whose intellect is stable’ – this is synonymous to
‘*sthitapragnaha*’.

HOW DOES A STHITAPRAGNA PERSON SPEAK?

Along with the characteristics of one who
is *sthitapragna*, Arjuna also asks questions
regarding the manner in which a *sthitapragna*
person speaks, rests and moves. Arjuna wishes
to adopt a clear path by which he can mould
his life. He wants to understand this by learning

from a living example, since anyone wishing to master an art keeps someone who has mastered that art as their role model. An aspiring sportsperson constantly tries to learn from an expert sportsperson. He takes a detailed look at everything his role model does. He engrosses himself in his thoughts, and as a result, he too reaches the peaks of success. Arjuna has a similar expectation in his mind. He wants to know the art of seeing mental stability in the ordinary activities, like speaking, resting and walking, of great men.

Also apparent from this question regarding how a *sthitapragna* person speaks, rests and walks, is that Arjuna understands the importance of body language. Body language is the language of actions, the language of conduct. One's actions in the form of speaking, sitting and walking are a reflection of one's true character. One's thoughts can be deduced from what one says. Often, a person's mental state can be inferred just from hearing them speak. Sometimes, the unstable minded do not themselves know what they are saying. The same applies for other actions, such as resting and walking, as well. Arjuna wants to know about the inner calmness that is reflected in one's conduct.

In this way, Arjuna's question unites philosophy with life. Philosophy is not merely a matter for debate. It is not merely about churning out thoughts. It is not just an intellectual exercise. It is not merely a wave of thoughts that builds imaginary ideals. Philosophy is a means to a concrete goal. It is true experience of that which exists. It plays a major part in how we conduct our lives. That which cannot become a part of one's life, cannot be called philosophy. Arjuna's question clearly shows this.

WHEN ONE ABANDONS ONE'S DESIRES

Answering the question, Shri Krishna says, 'प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोज्ञान्। आत्मज्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोज्यते॥' – '*Prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān Pārtha manogatān, ātmanyevātmanā tushtaha*

sthitapragnastadochyate.' – 'O Arjuna! When one abandons all desires that arise in the mind, and finds contentment only in Paramātmā who resides within one's own *ātmā*, one can be called *sthitapragna*' (Gitā 2.55).

'*Prajahāti*' means to renounce, to abandon. Renunciation is the first step to becoming *sthitapragna*. It is not possible to become *sthitapragna* while still continuing to do as one has always been doing. There is no choice but to adopt renunciation. Therefore, renunciation has been put first.

'*Kāmān*' means desires. Desires for worldly pleasures. It is these desires that need to be renounced. As long as one has such desires, one cannot experience stability in life. The influence of these desires is not insignificant. The dominance of these desires is not limited to just humans, but affects animals also. Observing the day to day activities of animals will reveal this. Birds are always eager to go to a place they like and rush to eat something tasty. If they do not like the taste of something, they show their dislike. This is the impact of desires.

Once, I saw this in a snake first hand. One afternoon during the monsoon season, a snake caught a frog. A sadhu saw this and before the snake could swallow the frog, he clapped and made a loud noise. The snake dropped the frog and slid away. The sadhu remained there, curious to see what would happen. After a while, the snake came back to the same spot looking for the frog. This is the dominance of desires.

Now let us talk about ourselves. Everyone, from a new born baby to an old person, is chained by the shackle of desires. As children we had certain wishes. Childhood passed, but the desires continued: "I have seen this, now I want to see that. I have tasted this, now I want to taste that. I have got this, now I want to get that. I want to go there, I want to meet that person..." These waves of desires continue to flow in one's mind. We are unable to sit in peace. Desires do not let us rest, and the restlessness increases.

Moreover, we cannot settle on one decision, new desires continue to arise. When this increases, mental restlessness takes root. As a result we are subject to feelings of anguish, incompleteness and emptiness.

That is why the Gita inspires us to overcome mundane desires.

Another thing worth noting here is that Shri Krishna does not just say ‘*kāmān*’, but ‘*sarvān kāmān*’. ‘*Sarvān kāmān*’ means all desires. One becomes *sthitapragna* when one abandons all mundane desires. It is easy to abandon the desires for a couple of things. There is no effort involved in abandoning desires for things that one does not like. But not having one or two desires does not make one free of desires, for that one has to abandon all mundane desires.

SATISFIED BY PARAMĀTMĀ ALONE

‘*Ātmanyevātmanā tushtaha sthitapraghnastadochyate*’ – ‘When one finds contentment only in Paramātmā who resides within one’s own *ātmā*, one can be called *sthitapragna*.’

A satisfied person is forever happy. Why? Because he has no desires. Discontent and feelings of incompleteness are the root of desires. Desires arise in the discontented. The discontented scrounge desperately. Discontentment does not let a person be calm and sit peacefully. Only complete satisfaction brings an end to desires.

It is true that everyone aspires for complete satisfaction. However, instead of striving for the complete, people desire trivial things. Limited things cannot give unlimited satisfaction. The benefit of limited satisfaction is also finite, and therefore one does not experience total fulfilment. One can only attain supreme satisfaction if one attains something that is supreme. Paramātmā is complete and supreme. One’s thirst for satisfaction is only quenched when one attains him and develops firm conviction in him. Then one becomes submerged in fulfilment. The mind is no longer agitated by

mundane desires. The *antahkaran* becomes like a pure, still and peaceful lake – this, according to the Gita, is the *sthitapragna* state.

The lives of Satpurushas are examples of such a *sthitapragna* state. On 4 July 2004, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Orlando. Seeing his old age, illnesses and hectic travels, a devotee named Rajan expressed his thoughts saying, “Swami, you endure great strain even at such an old age. All we want for you now is to remain happy.”

Hearing this, Swami said, “My friend, we are always in Akshardham. We have attained Maharaj (Parabrahman Paramātmā Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan) and we have attained our guru. If we always remain elated about that, then we will always be happy.”

His body was weak, yet his words showed his *sthitapragna* state oozing from the complete attainment of the supreme.

Once, someone expressed their wish to Swamishri, “Looking at your work which is for the benefit of all, you should get a Nobel Prize.”

In reply, Swamishri said, “I have obtained something much greater than a Nobel Prize. I have obtained Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. I have obtained the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. I have obtained this chance of service. I have obtained Bhagwan, and all these sadhus and devotees; what greater attainment is there in this world?”

This is the sparkling satisfaction of one who has reduced all mundane desires of fame to ashes, and is fully content with Paramātmā. Nothing and nobody can disturb such a person’s mental stability.

Thus, Shri Krishna Bhagwan says to Arjuna, “O Arjuna! When you abandon all mundane desires in this way, and remain content with Paramātmā alone, you will also be called *sthitapragna*.” ♦

Hindu Festivals

March-April 2012

7-8 MARCH 2012

HOLI, DHULETI (FAGAN SUD 15, VAD 1)

Holi, the most colourful festival in the Hindu calendar, is celebrated on this day. The word 'Holi' is derived from the Sanskrit *holaaka*, meaning roasted grain. From Vedic times people harvested grain and offered it to the *devas*. Offering this new grain is the Holi festival (Jaimini Gruhyasutra 1.3.15-16).

Traditionally, Holi has several roots. It arose when the cowherds jubilantly burnt the dead body of the demoness Putna after the child Shri Krishna vanquished her. Another belief is that it arose after the *gopis* destroyed *kama* (lust) by their exuberant devotion to Shri Krishna. A third *katha* celebrates the child devotee Prahlad's protection from his aunt, Holika, by Bhagwan Vishnu. She tried to burn him, instigated by Prahlad's demon father, Hiranyakashipu.

On this day, Hindus sprinkle coloured powder and water of *kesuda* (*tesu*) flowers on each

other. A fire, also known as *holi*, is kindled in parks and villages squares, in which coconuts are offered. People offer puja to the *holi* by circumambulating it.

In Vaishnav mandirs, deities are adorned with garlands of *haarda* – crystallized sugar. The traditional food offering is roasted grain, dates and popped *jowar* or popcorn.

Of all the states in India, Holi is celebrated with the greatest zest in Rajasthan on the next day, known as Dhuleti. In Bengal, the festival starts on Falgun *sud* 14 and is known as Dol Yatra. In Tamil Nadu it is known as Kamadahan and as Shingo in Konkan, Goa and Maharashtra.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Falgun Purnima also marks the birth anniversary of Bhagatji Maharaj, the second spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Holi is celebrated in Sarangpur, Gujarat, on a grand scale.

Holi festival



Swaminarayan Jayanti, Sarangpur



23 MARCH

GUDI PADAVO (CHAITRA SUD 1)

This day, known as Gudi Padavo, is especially celebrated in Maharashtra. Special puja is offered at home by tying a *kalash* with a cloth on the top of a neem branch. This is then posted outside the house. People traditionally have *puran poli* – sweet stuffed chapati on this day.

1 APRIL

**RAMNAVMI & SWAMINARAYAN JAYANTI
(CHAITRA SUD 9)**

Both Shri Ramachandra Bhagwan and Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated on Chaitra *sud* 9; the former at 12.00 p.m. and the latter at 10.10 p.m. Both established dharma and the ideals of character. By his life, Shri Rama bequeathed to India the concept of Rama *rajya* – an ideal kingdom suffused with truthful political rule and order, dharma, peace and righteous living. Even today, Shri Rama's virtues of equanimity in honour and insult, steadfastness in life's vicissitudes, magnanimity towards devotees and dissenters alike, are inspiring virtues.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) incarnated to establish Ekantik Dharma, also known as Bhagvata Dharma. He effected this by initiating over 3,000 ascetics, building six Vedic

stone mandirs, writing a code of conduct known as Shikshapatri and by his teachings called the Vachanamrut. His unique contribution to Sanatana Dharma is his pledge to remain manifest on earth for all time through his spiritual successors. These are Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and presently, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

6 APRIL

HANUMAN JAYANTI (CHAITRA SUD PURNIMA)

Hanumanji is the deity who protects devotees from ghosts, evil elements and disease. He is a loyal and stalwart *bhakta* of Bhagwan Shri Rama. He is endowed with super human strength and virtues of *buddhimatam varishtha* – supreme intelligence, *naishtikendra* – supreme celibacy and *dasatva bhakti* – devotion as servant of Shri Rama.

On this day of Chaitra *sud* Purnima, people perform *pujan* of Hanumanji with oil, sindur (orange powder), garlands of white *akado* flower and *shrifal*. *Havans* are held in front of shrines of Hanumanji, *chopai* recordings from the Ramayana are sounded from loudspeakers. The pujaris pour oil at the feet of Hanumanji on behalf of devotees and offer *prasad* of *bundi* laddu. ♦

Ramnavmi arti



Shri Hanumanji



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANCER

Part 2

In the previous issue the nature and causes of cancer were briefly highlighted. This article presents an overview of the main forms of treatment for cancer...

GOALS OF TREATMENT

There are three main aims of treating cancer, depending on the type and its spread:

1. Cure – to free the patient of disease after treatment and enable a normal life.
2. Control – to limit spread.
3. Palliative Care – to maintain the highest possible quality of life.

How Is Cancer Treated?

Cancer is treated by four main methods. Often, combinations of methods are required to eradicate or control the cancer.

Surgery

This means cutting the tumour (cancerous growth) out. It is important that the tumour is completely removed so that no cancerous material is left behind. For this, the surgeon visually checks the operation site, and also, the removed tumour specimen is examined under the microscope to make sure that its edges are clear of any cancer. This is called a complete resection. Surgery is by far the best way to cure cancer.

Sometimes cancers can be operated on, but it may not be appropriate. For example, if a lung tumour has already spread outside the lungs (e.g., to the bones) then an operation will not alter the outcome. So to use the car example, again, if a car has a faulty engine and a broken axle, there is no point repairing just the engine, since the car will still not move anyway.

For some types of cancer surgery plays no major role. For example, in blood cancer, the cancer is in the blood and so cannot be cut out.

Radiotherapy

This involves using high energy radiation (e.g., X-rays, gamma rays) on the affected part of the body to destroy the cancer cells. Radiotherapy is generally given with the patient lying on a couch in a specific position. Then a radiotherapy machine is placed over the part of the body to be treated and the radiation given to the patient. This is like a beam of light being shone onto that part of the body. Radiotherapy will only treat the part of the body that the energy beam is “shone” onto.

Sometimes, the source of radiation is placed inside the body at the diseased site. This is called brachytherapy (internal radiation). Another way of delivering radiation is by using a chemotherapy drug to target the cancer cells (radioimmunotherapy).

Radiotherapy is given for two major reasons: to eradicate the cancer and cure the patient (a “radical” or high dose of radiotherapy) or to try to improve and control the cancer symptoms that the patient has (a “palliative” or low dose).

Early side effects of radiation treatment affect fast-growing cells, and includes fatigue. They begin shortly following therapy, and subside over time. Late side effects are due to damage to tissues or organs, and begin months or years after therapy.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the use of drugs (chemicals) to treat cancer. Due to advances in drug development over recent years, there are now many drugs that are active against cancer.

Drug therapy can be given to shrink a tumour

to make a previously inoperable tumour operable (neoadjuvant therapy). It can be given after surgery to completely remove any remnants of cancer (adjuvant chemotherapy). However, despite completely removing the tumour, patients may still relapse (the cancer may return) in the future due to cancer cells which have been shed by the cancer before surgery and become lodged elsewhere in the body (microscopic deposits). Such cells cannot be detected by any test. Adjuvant therapy is used to try to kill these cells. When cure is not possible patients are treated with palliative drug therapy (often called systemic therapy) to improve their quality of life, and potentially also to extend life.

Chemotherapeutic drugs are many different groups of drugs that all act by killing human cells – both healthy and cancerous. They are therefore a poison. However, cancer cells are more susceptible to chemotherapy than normal cells. Since normal cells are also killed patients have side effects from chemotherapy, such as, vomiting or hair loss. Most chemotherapy drugs are given directly into the blood intravenously (via the veins). Chemotherapy can also be given as injections, or tablets, and rarely liquids or topical creams.

Best Supportive Care

In addition to the main treatment for cancer, supportive care includes blood transfusions, pain control medication, drugs to prevent or treat nausea and vomiting, treatment for skin rash, drugs to boost the immune system and prevent infection, and antibiotics. Such supportive care is given either in combination with the other therapies or by itself if treatment of the cancer is not possible.

Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are how cancer doctors get scientific information to advance cancer treatments. Trials are research carried out on patients to try to find better treatments for cancer. They can be carried out to test new cancer treatments

and new combinations of drugs, to compare supportive medication for treatments, or to get more information on how a treatment works.

Trials are the only reliable and scientifically sound way to test a treatment and therefore advance knowledge, and give benefit to patients in the future. There are both potential benefits and risks in participating in a clinical trial. Before entering the trial, patients are informed about the trial, the aim of the trial, why it is being performed, the treatment being tested, and the benefits as well as the potential risks. Patients are not placed under any pressure to take part and are given enough time to make their own decision, after speaking to other people if needed.

Clinical trials are very carefully controlled, and patient safety is the most important concern. Therefore, trials are tightly regulated by various legal safeguards and monitored by regulatory authorities, such as, the FDA in America, or the MHRA in the UK. Trials conform to the World Health Organization principles of Good Clinical Practice as well as the EU Clinical Trials Directive to ensure patient safety is paramount. No trial can go ahead without independent scientific review as well as review by an independent Ethics Committee to ensure that undue risks are not being taken, and that patients are not knowingly being offered inferior treatment.

The benefits for patients participating in trials include access to a Research Nurse, potentially receiving tomorrow's treatment today, and having very careful monitoring both during and after the trial.

How to Get More Information

In addition to the medical staff treating the patient, the hospital will have lots of information leaflets and booklets. There are also many good websites which provide reliable information. These include: ■ Macmillan Cancer Support: www.macmillan.org.uk ■ Cancer Research UK: <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org> ■ National Cancer Institute (USA): www.cancer.gov

LIVING WITH CANCER

After a diagnosis has been made, proceeding with treatment is often the most important thing. Eating a well balanced diet is important as is doing some exercise. Special diets may be required for some types of cancer. For weight loss due to the cancer, a building-up diet rich in foods containing energy can benefit. Patients on chemotherapy should avoid certain types of food, such as, unpasteurized milk and cheese. Being fit and active gives many benefits, including, reducing tiredness, reducing stress, maintaining bone health and reducing risk of blood clots. Much of what is written about the benefits of diets rich in anti-oxidants has little, if any, evidence.

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY

‘Complementary therapy’ is a broad term describing a wide range of supportive care, in-

cluding, aromatherapy, acupuncture, homeopathy, ayurveda, vitamins and other supplements. These therapies may help in coping with the stresses caused by cancer and cancer treatments and also help to relieve specific symptoms or side effects. Studies are under way to assess the safety and usefulness of many cancer-related complementary therapies.

Whether or not complementary therapy should be used should first be discussed with the oncologist to ensure that it does not interfere with the conventional treatment being provided. Often, patients think that natural treatments must be safe. However, many natural products have been scientifically shown to interact with anti-cancer drugs in a harmful way. Also, many anti-cancer chemotherapy drugs were first identified from natural products; so natural does not necessarily mean safe. ♦

CANCER MYTHS AND TRUTHS

Myth	Truth
Cancer is generally incurable.	Cancer is generally curable if caught early enough.
There is no point in having cancer screening (e.g., breast mammogram, cervical smear, stool testing).	Taking part in screening is the best way to detect early cancer (before it is big enough to cause problems) and to cure it.
Cancer is getting more and more common.	Actually, there are now better facilities to diagnose cancer than in the past and doctors are testing more patients for cancer than they did previously, so it seems there is more cancer. However, the level has generally been the same for the past 50 years.
If a person has developed cancer, they must have done something to cause it.	Some cancers are due to lifestyle: smoking causes lung cancer, chewing tobacco or betel nuts (<i>sopari</i>) causes cancer of the mouth and neck. However, these cancers can still occur, though much less frequently, in patients who have never taken tobacco or <i>sopari</i> . Most cancers occur due to random errors of the body's cells, which may be contributed to by lifestyle.
I'm probably going to get cancer anyway, so why should I modify my lifestyle?	There is still a lot that can be done to prevent cancer: stopping smoking, not drinking alcohol, losing weight and being active are the best ways to minimize the risk of cancer.
Complimentary therapies are better than standard Western medicines in treating cancer.	No complementary treatments have been shown to be superior to conventional medicines.
I will lose my hair and vomit with chemotherapy.	This depends on the type of chemotherapy drug used. Many drugs do not cause hair loss or sickness.

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

October, November, December 2011 & January 2012

Mumbai



Swamishri celebrates the festival of Vasant Panchmi, Mumbai



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* ritual of arti

OCTOBER: MUMBAI

6, Thursday

The Akshardham Mahamandir Shilanyas Mahotsav commenced in Robbinsville, New Jersey, USA, with Swamishri performing the rituals in Mumbai, India, from 5.40 p.m. via a live video-conference link. (Details: *Swaminarayan Bliss*, Nov.-Dec. 2011, pgs. 14-15.)

11, Tuesday; 227th Birthday Celebration of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami (Sharad Punam)

After Thakorji's darshan in the morning Swamishri was garlanded and honoured for the festive celebration of Sharad Punam by Pujya Kothari Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Kothari Abhayswarup Swami. Prior to Swamishri's arrival the Sharad Punam celebration assembly was held beneath the mandir dome. Senior sadhus spoke about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami.

14, Friday

During Swamishri's morning darshan ses-

sion Swamishri blessed the Land Minister of Uganda. He also blessed the students of the BAPS Hostel, Nagpur, and the devotees of Badalpur by gesturing their style of playing long musical pipes.

16, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated the DVD on *Mystic India* (large format film) produced by BAPS. He also blessed the renowned Indian percussionist Shri Shivamani.

26, Wednesday; Diwali Festival

At 8.00 a.m. Swamishri commenced his puja in his room. At about 9.00 a.m. He came to the Nilkanth Abhishek Mandap for darshan. The accounts books were ritually worshipped (Chopda Pujan) by the senior sadhus. Swamishri performed the Chopda Pujan *arti* and sanctified the rice grains and flowers to be showered on the books.

Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari*

mandir in Lakhiyani (Gadhada region). Then Swamishri gave his Diwali blessings to the devotees in the Abhishek Mandap, “Today, people in every village and town of India celebrate Diwali. Shriji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj had also celebrated this festival many times and blessed the devotees with happiness. On this auspicious day the lighting of *divas* (lamps) also illumine our minds and hearts. One is inspired to give up one’s bad nature and habits today. Bhagwan Swaminarayan brought his Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami, with him to reveal that we have to become *aksharrup* in order to offer bhakti to Purushottam. Because of body-consciousness (*dehbbhav*) we suffer from many afflictions and miseries in life. However, when we believe and realize that we are *atma*, we transcend all miseries.”

Thereafter, Swamishri did darshan of Thakorji in the mandir and blessed devotees from India and abroad assembled beneath the mandir dome.

Swamishri gave darshan to all for 55 minutes. The festive occasion was relayed live through Aastha Channel and the Sanstha’s website.

27, Thursday; New Year’s Day (Bestu Varsh)

Swamishri performed his puja in his room. At 8.30 a.m. He came for Thakorji’s darshan. A grand *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri sat before Thakorji in the mandir and a *thal* was sung. The entire celebration was telecast live by Aastha Channel and webcasted on baps.org.

Swamishri blessed the devotees seated beneath the mandir dome, saying, “Today is New Year’s Day and we have been blessed by the darshan of Thakorji and the Annakut. May the New Year go well and our lives become happier, peaceful and joyful. We have offered *annakut* to God, but he is the King of kings. He has given us infinite happiness so we must think what we can do for him. On New Year’s

Day may we pray to him; say *mala* and do puja daily so that he takes care of us. God has given us intelligence, so whatever we have gained is due to him. When one believes this one can remain humble.”

In conclusion, Puja Kothari Swami and Puja Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands. Swamishri performed the *annakut arti* and thereafter did darshan of Nilkanth Varni in the Abhishek Mandap.

30, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs at Dhrol (near Bhadra) and Latipur.

NOVEMBER: MUMBAI

6, Sunday; Prabodhini Ekadashi

Swamishri arrived at the Abhishek Mandap for darshan. On both sides varieties of vegetables were displayed. Swamishri sanctified the vegetables by showering rose petals.

In the mandir an *annakut* of dry fruits, walnuts, almonds, cashews and nuts was arranged in the sanctum of Harikrishna Maharaj, fresh vegetables were arranged in the central sanctum and different varieties of fruits were displayed in the shrine of Ghanshyam Maharaj. After darshan Swamishri came to the area beneath the mandir dome, where a vegetable shop had been set up to celebrate the occasion. Swamishri’s chair was wheeled into the centre of the shop. Puja Kothari Swami garlanded Swamishri to commemorate the *diksha* day of Shriji Maharaj and the *parshad diksha* of Swamishri. Then, one by one, Swamishri took each vegetable (radish, brinjal, *amla*, *galka*, capsicum chilly, lemon, ginger, etc.) in his hand and showed it to the devotees. The devotees feasted upon the joyous darshan of Swamishri. Finally Swamishri performed *arti* in all three shrines of the mandir.

9, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (marble), Hanumanji, Ganapatiji and Guru Parampara (painting) for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Khodu (Surendranagar district).

14, Monday

BAPS and the Mumbai Municipal Corporation were sponsoring the under-construction pink-stone gateway, ‘Swaminarayan Ganesh Dwar’, at Shivaji Park. The gateway would be adorned with 1008 *murtis* of Ganeshji in 28 different *mudras*. Swamishri sanctified 28 *murtis* of Shri Ganeshji. (For photos see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, Jan.-Feb. 2012, title pg. 3.)

15, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for three BAPS *hari* mandirs and a *sanskardham* in Melbourne and Brisbane (Australia), Christchurch (New Zealand) and Shubhanpura (Vadodara).

24, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Rasnol, Bechri and Boriavi (Anand district).

26, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of new marble *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Radha-Krishna Dev, Sita-Ram Dev, Shiva-Parvatiji, Hanumanji and Ganapatiji and Guru Parampara (painting) for the BAPS mandir in Johannesburg, South Africa.

DECEMBER: MUMBAI

2 Friday; Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 91st Birthday Celebration

At 8.00 a.m. Swamishri performed his morning puja in his room. Sadhus sang bhajans dur-

ing puja in praise of Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri came for darshan in the Nilkanth Abhishek Mandap. An arch-shaped decoration of flowers was arranged as a backdrop to the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. A *murti* of Nilkanth Varni made of ghee was displayed, depicting his travels in the Himalayas. Before the *murtis* of Guru Parampara 91 different types of fruits and a large cake were arranged as an offering. Garlands prepared by various Satsang centres in Mumbai were also displayed. Swamishri saw the offerings and showered his grace.

On entering the Mandir shrine a grand *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji to commemorate the Mandir’s 28th consecration anniversary (*patotsav*). Swamishri performed *arti* in all three shrines. Puja Kothari Swami and Puja Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands. Then Swamishri inaugurated the Vachanamrut app for the Apple ipad and iphone.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly of devotees and dignitaries, saying, “*Jais* of all sadhus and devotees! The reason being that all of you have put in great effort for the growth of Satsang. This is so because of the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

“We are unable to do anything. Yogiji Maharaj prayed that may the numbers of mandirs increase, sadhus increase and Satsang flourish. It is because of his wish that I am able to have your darshan. You have consolidated satsang in your *jiva*, otherwise how could one bear such difficulties. Yogiji Maharaj used to call it *bhida-bhakti*. When one realizes the knowledge of *atma* one will not feel hurt when someone tells one off. When one imbibes the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma, no matter in whichever part of the world one may be, one’s work will be accomplished.”

Swamishri’s darshan and blessings were relayed live through Aastha and the Sanstha’s website.

7, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Shantadevi Nagar (Navsari), and Avtadiya and Veraval (Junagadh district).

10, Saturday; Observance of Lunar Eclipse

At 6.15 p.m. Swamishri and sadhus observed the lunar eclipse by doing bhajan, viewing satsang video clips, and narrating one's personal experiences about Satsang. Swamishri, too, narrated his own incidents: train journey from Atladra to Sarangpur to meet Shastriji Maharaj and how the land for Akshardham, New Delhi, was acquired.

At 9.50 p.m., *dhun* was sung to conclude the lunar eclipse assembly. Swamishri sat in the assembly for three-and-a-half hours.

11, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and puja of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for BAPS *hari* mandir in Jalalpor (Navsari).

14, Wednesday

For the inauguration at Shivaji Park this evening of 'BAPS Swaminarayan Ganesh Dwar', sponsored by BAPS and the Mumbai Nagar-palika (Municipal Corporation), a representative from Mayor Shraddha Jadav's office was present this morning in the mandir. Swamishri offered a flower to a *murti* of Shri Ganeshji, which was to be installed at the Mayor's house. The *murti* was given to the Mayor's representative. Swamishri also sanctified the *nada-chhadi* to be used for the inauguration ceremony in the evening.

As part of the inaugural rituals a *mahapuja* was performed in the morning at Shivaji Park by BAPS sadhus. In the evening the inaugural ceremony took place in the presence of senior BAPS sadhus and officials of Mumbai Nagar-

palika. (See photos *Swaminarayan Bliss*, Jan.-Feb. 2012, title 3.)

15, Thursday

Prior to Swamishri's arrival a *mahapuja* was performed at Dadar Mandir as part of the ground-breaking ceremony (*khat-muhurt*) for Khodal Dham Mandir to be built at Kagvad, near Virpur (near Gondal), in the presence of senior sadhus and trustees of Khodal Dham Mandir.

Swamishri blessed the main trustees and sanctified the main Dharani-*shila* (stone) to be placed by showering flowers on it.

25, Sunday, Swamishri's Bhagvati Diksha Day

Swamishri arrived at the Abhishek Mandap for darshan. The scene of Swamishri's *bhagvati diksha* at Gondal by Shastriji Maharaj was set up with a painting of Akshar Deri in the background. Swamishri remembered the occasion that took place 72 years ago. After Swamishri did Thakorji's darshan in the mandir Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami offered a flower-shawl and garlands to him.

A citation on 'World Peace Prize' and *murti* of Sant Jnaneshwar was conferred to the BAPS by members of 'Philosopher Saint Shri Dnyaneshwara [Jnaneshwar] World Peace Committee'. The 'World Peace Prize' was presented by the Governor of Maharashtra Shri Shankarnarayanan to Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

JANUARY 2012: MUMBAI

3, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pushpanjali* for *murtis* of BAPS *hari* mandirs in Undhval, Surkhai and Kalvada (Tithal region), and Koba and Jhakora (Gandhinagar region).

4, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for BAPS *kutir* mandirs in the Ukai tribal region, namely, Chimkuva, Tokarva, Kharsi, Champavadi, Ghodchit, Singhpur and Mayali.

8, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated an English publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 'Hindu Womenhood', authored by Sadhu Mukundcharandas.

9, Monday; Gunatit Diksha Utsav

To celebrate Poshhi Punam, the day Gunatitanand Swami was given *diksha* by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, an ambience of the *diksha* ceremony was set up in the Abhishek Mandap and in the central mandir shrine. Swamishri was pleased with the *diksha* darshan.

14, Saturday; Uttarayan

Swamishri arrived at the Abhishek Mandap, which was decorated with kites. Large displays of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj with the begging bags (*jholis*) hanging from their shoulders was arranged in the Mandap. A *rangoli* of Nilkanth Varni begging for alms was created before the *murtis* of Guru Parampara. After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri came to the mandir dome. Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami hailed the *jholi* call of 'Swaminarayan Hare Sachchidanand Prabho'. Pujya Viveksagar briefly spoke about the importance of Uttarayan *jholi* and how Swamishri used to beg for alms while studying Sanskrit in Bhadran. Then bowls full of different grains were given to Swamishri, who displayed them to the devotees before him. When Swamishri held each bowl, filled with rice, millet, wheat grains and *tuver*, flattened rice, cooking oil, *val*, *rai*, gur and sugar, the announcer described their qualities and virtues. Swamishri then blessed the gathering saying that the tradition of begging

grains in the Sampradaya was initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Nilkanth Varni) and thereafter it was continued by Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. The BAPS mandirs were built with the aid of food grains received in *jholis*. Finally, Swamishri blessed all for consolidation of satsang, devotion and prosperity in their lives. Then Swamishri hailed the *jholi* call 'Swaminarayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho'. In conclusion, senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands.

16, Monday, Lighting of Lamp to Launch the 60th Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Yuvak Mandal

On arriving at the Nilkanth Abhishek Mandap Swamishri lighted the lamp to launch the 60th Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Yuvak Mandal before the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni.

19, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Petlad and Ardi (Mahelav region) and Un (Sankari region).

28, Saturday; Vasant Panchmi

Swamishri celebrated the festival of Vasant Panchmi before Thakorji in the mandir. Five bowls of water scented with saffron (*kesar*), rose, sandalwood (*chandan*) and others were used to offer *abhishek* to the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. Swamishri sanctified the Vasant *kalash* by offering flower petals. The backdrop of the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj in the Abhishek Mandap was decorated with flowers, symbolizing the advent of the spring season (Vasant). Finally, senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekshivandas

Living with Swamishri

October-December 2011 and January-February 2012, Mumbai

OCTOBER 2011: MUMBAI

SWAMISHRI'S DIVINE VISION

16, Sunday

Swamishri was engaged in routine correspondence. Dharmacharan Swami was informing Swamishri about the content of one letter. There were three things that the devotee had asked. After Swamishri had answered the three questions Dharmacharan Swami was about to put the letter down. Swamishri told him, "There is still one more thing left. See what's written at the bottom." On reading the last line Dharmacharan Swami said, "He has an addiction for tobacco, and he wishes to give it up." Swamishri replied, "Tell him to make herculean efforts and remember God. He'll become free from it altogether."

Swamishri is aware of the contents of devotees' letters through his divine vision, and he takes care to solve their problems.

SWAMISHRI KNOWS

19, Wednesday

Swamishri was reviewing the plan for a *hari* mandir. At that time Dharmacharan Swami was seated opposite him reading some letters from devotees. Swamishri was doing two things simultaneously: looking at the plan and listening to the content of the letters. In the case of one letter, while Dharmacharan Swami was quickly reading it, he inadvertently skipped half a line and started reading the next line. Instantly Swamishri placed his finger on the letter and stopped him, saying, "You've left this out." Swamishri told him to re-read the whole letter.

Swamishri is all-knowing and meticulous in his correspondance and other tasks.

ADVICE TO NOT BECOME ADVERSE

23, Sunday

Swamishri was going down in the lift from

his living quarters for darshan of Thakorji. An aspirant asked Swamishri, "You have instructed me to pursue advanced Sanskrit studies. The curriculum mostly includes the study of logic. Bless me that by studying logic my intellect does not stray from spiritual faith."

Swamishri advised, "One should remember Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. You are studying to please them. Remember this and your intellect will not become adverse."

FIRM REFUGE IN GOD

25, Tuesday

A person's letter to Swamishri said, "I've tried my hand at several businesses but none have worked so far. I've been facing losses for 14 years. Finally, I had my father's horoscope cast and I found he has Chandal-yog and Shapit *dosh* – which are believed to be responsible for our failures."

Swamishri smiled and blessed, "The moment one resorts to such things one becomes more distressed and miserable. God is the all-doer. One should have firm faith that whatever happens is due to God's wish. Have firm refuge in God. God will do good."

NOVEMBER 2011: MUMBAI

KEYS TO SUCCESS

11, Friday,

Aksharprem Swami of Jaipur mandir called Swamishri to inform him about the success of the *annakut* festival held at the mandir. Swamishri replied, "You are all doing *seva* with unity and harmony so [the *annakut*] was a success. Take care of devotees and guests who come there. God will bless you all."

SATSANG RITUALS – A CURE FOR TROUBLES

23, Wednesday

A devotee explained his problematic situ-

ation in a letter to Swamishri. He wrote, “My wife is possessed by a ghost. She jumps, screams, breaks her *kanthi*, swears, attacks and tries to frighten us. My in-laws say that because we believe in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and do not believe in other *devis*, *devas* and *bhuvas* (exorcists) we are being harassed. They have advised us to place a coconut and perform certain rituals.

“On the other hand my grandmother and sister do not believe in such things. We have unflinching faith in and are firmly wedded to Satsang, yet tell us what ritual we should do to extricate ourselves from these afflictions.”

Swamishri responded, “Pledge 100 *mahapujas* at Akshar Deri, Gondal, do two extra *malas* daily and chant the Janmangal Namavali twice daily. Have faith. I bless you that whatever it is will go away and you will have peace in life.”

CHANTING THE NAME OF GOD TO OVERCOME MISERY

23, Wednesday

A devotee’s letter revealed the dire predicament of his daughter, “My daughter was studying in Vidyanagar (Gujarat). Her friend gave her *prasad* that she had received from a *bawa* (renunciant). From that day her problems related to her body started. She has been suffering like this for three years. She behaves as if she is mentally blank and lost. She never comes out of our house. She never talks with anyone and is always depressed. It seems as if someone has a hold over her. She has stopped studying, in spite of her being intelligent. She was in her final year of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), but did not appear for the exams. I have tried to get her diagnosed and treated in many places. I’ve consulted many doctors and made pledges at various shrines, but to no effect. My sister and brother-in-law are staunch *satsangis* and they have asked me to take your blessings. What should I do to cure my daughter?”

Swamishri answered, “Do Janmangal Paath¹ five times and five *malas* daily.”

WISHES FOR TOTAL HAPPINESS AND THE GOOD HEALTH OF ALL

24, Thursday

Swamishri was engaged in darshan of Thakorji in the morning. Thereafter, Dilipbhai Trivedi, a devotee from Ahmedabad, requested Swamishri, “I have come to ask of you today not to give any grave illness to [your] sadhus. The sadhus have given up their names, towns, parents and everything for you.”

Immediately Swamishri referred to the *murti* of Maharaj and said, “They [sadhus] have given up everything for Maharaj.”

Dilipbhai shot back, “Maharaj is present in you, that is why I am telling you. Whenever sadhus are in pain how much must it pain Maharaj? Shower your blessings so that the sadhus suffer as little as possible.”

Instantly, Swamishri replied, “Why give them even a little [suffering]?”

WEDDED TO SATSANG SUSTAINS FAITH

24, Thursday

A devotee youth rang Swamishri and asked, “How’s your health?”

Swamishri replied, “I am feeling a little weak. But with the doctor’s treatment I’m getting better.”

The youth prayed, “As a householder there are difficulties and problems, but I ask for your blessings that I never lose faith in you.”

Swamishri referred to the deep faith of his grandfather and father for Satsang and replied, “You were born in an illustrious household. Your forefathers had firm faith. Since you also have satsang in your life there’s no cause for worry.”

GURU SHOWS THE WAY

25, Friday

During Swamishri’s daily morning round of Thakorji’s darshan and blessing devotees he saw

1. Saying 108 names of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Harshadbhai Rana sitting on a chair under the mandir dome.

Swamishri asked him, “Where have you come from?”

“Akshardham,” replied Harshadbhai instantly.

“But who showed you the way?” Swamishri questioned.

“Yourself.”

Swamishri raised his hand in front and replied, “Yogi Bapa.”

The guru shows us the pathway to God’s abode (Akshardham).

BHAJAN HELPS FULFIL ONE’S WISHES

30, Wednesday

After *abhishek* darshan of Nilkanth Varni Swamishri came to the *murtis* of Guru Parampara. He showered sanctified flowers on a large marble replica of Shriji Maharaj’s footprints placed on the floor. The footprints were going to be consecrated in front of the mandir in Jaipur.

Aksharprem Swami petitioned, “Shower your blessings so that everyone’s wishes are fulfilled [by the darshan of these footprints].”

Swamishri replied, “They will fulfil the wishes of all.” Then Swamishri questioned, “Do you do bhajan?”

“Yes.”

“But whose? Your body’s!” interjected Swamishri. Then Swamishri stated, “Do bhajan of God and one’s wishes will be fulfilled.”

DECEMBER 2011: MUMBAI

SWAMISHRI’S ATTENTION IN BLESSING DEVOTEES

19, Monday

Swamishri’s daily morning darshan beneath the Mandir dome is eagerly awaited for by all devotees. When sadhus introduce devotees to Swamishri, he invariably instructs that sanctified roses be given to them. Sometimes when a rose does not reach a devotee, Swamishri makes sure

that he gets one.

This morning, as sadhus started introducing devotees, one of them did not get a rose. Swamishri immediately pointed out, “Give a rose to that devotee.” An attendant sadhu replied, “Whoever is introduced gets a rose.” In the meantime an introduction of another devotee was being given, but Swamishri’s attention was on the devotee who did not get a rose. Swamishri pointed to the devotee sitting far and said, “He has not got a rose.”

In fact, the devotee had been mistakenly left out. When a rose was given to the devotee, Swamishri stated, “I am aware [of who’s left out].”

In spite of blessing so many devotees from a distance Swamishri is attentive and particular in blessing devotees with sanctified roses.

JANUARY 2012: MUMBAI

A CONFESSION DISSOLVES ALL SINS

12, Thursday

A devotee had written a letter confessing his sins. He explained that five years ago he had accepted Satsang in his life. Before that he had killed countless ants, and many cockroaches and lizards. He had also intentionally destroyed birds’ eggs and misbehaved with others. But the day he understood what he had been doing was wrong, he gave up his bad habits. The devotee had asked for atonement for all his sins.

Swamishri blessed and said, “Since he has confessed his sins God will forgive him. May he have peace by the grace of God, and may God give him strength to refrain from sinning ever again.”

Swamishri blessed a repenting soul and prayed to God to forgive him. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekchandras



UK

BONE MARROW RECRUITMENT DRIVE

28 January 2012, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



In partnership with The Anthony Nolan Trust, BAPS Charities UK organized a recruitment drive for bone marrow donors on 28 January 2012 at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London. The event proved to be a notable success as 82 new donors registered.

Also, as part of the drive, 22 volunteers from BAPS Charities were trained in recruiting bone marrow donors.

USA

NEW BAPS MANDIR OPENS

2 January 2012, Warrington, PA, USA



Many devotees and well-wishers attended the inauguration of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Warrington, PA. The ceremony featured a traditional Vedic *mahapuja*, after which Mahant Swami installed the *murtis* previously sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In the celebration assembly, Mahant Swami spoke about the important role of mandirs in shaping our lives. The chief guest on this occasion was Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick, representative of the 8th Congressional District of Pennsylvania.

10TH ANNUAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY AT THE UNITED NATIONS

19-20 January 2012, New York

The Friendship Ambassadors Foundation



hosted the 10th annual Youth Assembly at the United Nations on 19-20 January 2012. The international conference connected youth from all over the world to share ideas on youth-driven initiatives to achieve the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This year's conference theme was "UNWIRED Generation: Youth Leveraging Technology for the MDGs & Sustainability".

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha sent a delegation of 15 youths to attend the conference. The delegates had the opportunity to net-

work with speakers, international NGOs and individuals from all over the world to share ideas on topics related to the Millennium Development Goals. The topics covered during the conference included youth and technology, sustainable development, health, education, empowerment of women, social entrepreneurship and global partnerships.

Africa

REGIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR 20-22 January 2012, Johannesburg



Around 90 *balaks* and *balikas*, together with 25 *bal* and *balika karyakars*, from Southern African BAPS centres in Mayfair, Lenasia, Pretoria, Durban, Tzaneen and Benoni participated in the Regional Bal-Balika Shibir held at the Willow Park Resort and Conference Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa from 20 to 22 January 2012. Based on the theme ‘Shastras’, the three-day *shibir* consisted of theme-specific interactive workshops, classroom sessions, related lecture sessions, skits, audio-visual shows, activities and team building exercises which enabled the children to learn about Hinduism’s scriptural treasures in an enjoyable way. The three major topics covered were: Hindu Shastras (Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharat, Ramayan); Swaminarayan Shastras (Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri, Swamini Vato) and Sant: The Living Shashtra.

BAPS PARTICIPATES IN TANZANIA’S NATIONAL TREE PLANTING DAY

1 January 2012, Dar-es-Salaam



BAPS Tanzania participated in Tanzania’s National Tree Planting Day on 1 January 2012 by planting 60 trees of five species at the Buguruni School for the Deaf and Dumb and Kisutu Primary School.

Middle East

PARIVAR ANAND DIN CELEBRATION 16 December 2011, Bahrain

On 16 December 2011, BAPS Bal-Balika Mandal, Bahrain, organized a Parivar Anand Din assembly in which 45 children and their parents participated.

The assembly began with dhun and prayers and featured short speeches, entertaining message-oriented games and video presentations. All parents and children were inspired by the assembly.

Asia Pacific

FAMILY SHIBIR, THEME: “SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT” 23-25 December 2011, Brisbane

A group of 80 devotees from Brisbane and the Gold Coast attended a three-day Family Shibir at Camp Moogerah, near Brisbane. The *shibir* focused on how values such as honesty, tolerance, faith, hard work and forgiveness can be learnt from Swamishri’s life.



The in-depth sessions for youngsters featuring lively videos, speeches and group discussions helped them to gain a more profound insight into spiritual matters. Also, collective morning puja sessions were held for all. The *shibir* enhanced everyone's understanding of satsang and fostered a spirit of unity amongst the young and old alike.

India

MITRA MANDIR MILAN December 2011, India



During December 2011, thousands of BAPS *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* across Gujarat and Mumbai invited their friends to the special 'Mitra Mandir Milan' assemblies held at their local BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandirs.

The special assemblies highlighted the valuable role played by mandirs in society by inspiring people to lead moral and spiritual lives and thus promoting peace and harmony in society. The wide range of social, spiritual, cultural, education-

al, medical, environmental and other activities which take place from BAPS mandirs were also presented. The assembly also emphasized the necessity of accepting a guru who is able to selflessly guide people through the turmoils of daily life.

'LEARN TO LIVE' STUDY CIRCLE SEMINARS 14 December 2011, Rajkot



Based on the topic "Learn to Live" two Study Circle Seminars were held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Rajkot.

On 19 November 2011, 6,000 graduate and post-graduate students participated in the interactive session with Dr Vijay Bhatkar, Architect of the Param Supercomputer and Padmashree Award Winner, and an enlightening speech on 'Secret of Real Success' by Brahmadarshan Swami.

On 14 December 2011, 9,000 9th standard to 12th standard students attended for the presentation on 'Goal Setting' by Mr. Jay Vasavada (well-known writer and speaker) and a speech by Aksharvatsal Swami, 'If There Is God's Touch'.

Through these Study Circle Seminars the youths were inspired to strive for a value-based education and to strengthen cultural and family values.

ANNUAL BAL-BALIKA KARYAKAR SHIBIRS, 'SAMARPAN'

16 December 2011 to 1 January 2012, India

From 16 December 2011 to 1 January 2012, the Bal Pravrutti Madhyasth Karyalaya (Children's Activities Central Office) conducted ten Annual Bal-Balika Karyakar Shibirs at seven lo-

cations in Gujarat. Over 7,000 children's activities volunteers and 85 sadhus from 230 regions throughout Gujarat and Maharashtra attended the one-and-a-half day *shibirs* based on the theme, 'Samarpan – Total Dedication'.

The volunteers were guided by senior sadhus – Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Tyagvalabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami – and other experienced sadhus. The *shibir* theme was also effectively conveyed by audio-visual presentations, group discussions and an inspiring drama titled, 'Samarpan Vandamahe'.

ANNUAL KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

16 December 2011 to 10 January 2012,
Gujarat, India



A total over 13,000 youth and satsang activities volunteers attended the 19 Annual Karyakar Shibirs organized by the Satsang Activities Central Office and held at eight *shikharbaddh* mandirs throughout Gujarat.

Based on the theme, 'Alpa Viram ke Purna Viram' – 'Pause or Period (Full Stop)', the *shibirs* guided the volunteers to advance beyond the pauses that interfere with spiritual progress and reach the ultimate goal of spiritual bliss – the period (full stop).

The volunteers were inspired by the experienced guidance of Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and other learned sadhus.

The *shibir* also featured enlightening video

shows, discussions and quizzes that further elaborated on the *shibir* theme.

LAUNCH OF BAPS YOUTH ACTIVITIES 60 YEARS CELEBRATIONS

15 January 2012, Mumbai



Realizing the necessity of harnessing and channelling the energy of youths into constructive endeavours, Yogiji Maharaj established the BAPS Youth Wing in 1952 in Mumbai, India. This provided an ideal platform for their physical, mental and spiritual progress. Under Yogiji Maharaj's enthusiastic guidance, the Youth Wing flourished. Today, under the equally wholehearted care of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS Youth Wing continues to inspire youths throughout the world to a noble life of service, devotion and discipline. This year, 2012, marks the 60th year of the BAPS Youth Wing. On 15 January 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj lit the ceremonial lamp to mark the launch of the BAPS Youth Wing's 60th year celebrations. Subsequently, between 29 January and 5 February 2012, BAPS centres throughout India held special assemblies to celebrate the launch of the Youth Wing's 60th year celebrations. These assemblies celebrated the noble values of service and self-discipline instilled in BAPS youths by depicting their stories through a series of short skits entitled 'The Power of One'. The assemblies also featured a colourful and lively dance performance by the youths based on the theme song for the BAPS Youth Wing's 60th year celebrations. ♦



**BRITISH ASTRONOMICAL
ASSOCIATION PRESENTS GOOD
LIGHTING AWARD
TO BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN
MANDIR, LEICESTER, UK
2 February 2012**

The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Leicester has been conferred the 'Good Lighting Award' by the British Astronomical Association (BAA) for its use of responsible, efficient, and 'sky-friendly' night-time lighting.

This is the first time the award was presented to a place of worship anywhere in the UK.

The award was presented by the officials of BAA, Bob Mizon MBE and Martin Morgan-Taylor, who is also Vice-President of the International Dark-Sky Association.

The Campaign for Dark Skies aims to preserve and restore the beauty of the night sky by working against overly bright and poorly directed lighting that shines where it is not wanted or needed.

Mr Morgan-Taylor commented that he was particularly impressed at how the project team had managed to take traditional Hindu temple architecture and blend it with modern technology to create both function and beauty. In particular, the committee paid tribute to the lighting of the *shikhars* (spires) and domes of the Mandir, which highlighted their intricate form without overspill into the night sky.

On seeing the low-voltage LED lighting and energy-saving motion-sensor switches used around the Mandir complex, Mr Mizon added that the streetlights of the future would soon be adopting the same sort of technology.



LAUNCH OF BAPS YOUTH WING'S 60TH YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Initiated by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in 1952, the BAPS Youth Wing has entered its 60th year. Swamishri inaugurated the year-long celebrations by lighting the ceremonial diya on 15 January 2012 in Mumbai. Then, between 22 and 29 January thousands of youths and devotees at all BAPS centres enjoyed the special assemblies celebrating the launch of the Youth Wing's 60th year. These assemblies depicted the Youth Wing's role in nurturing noble virtues in youths.